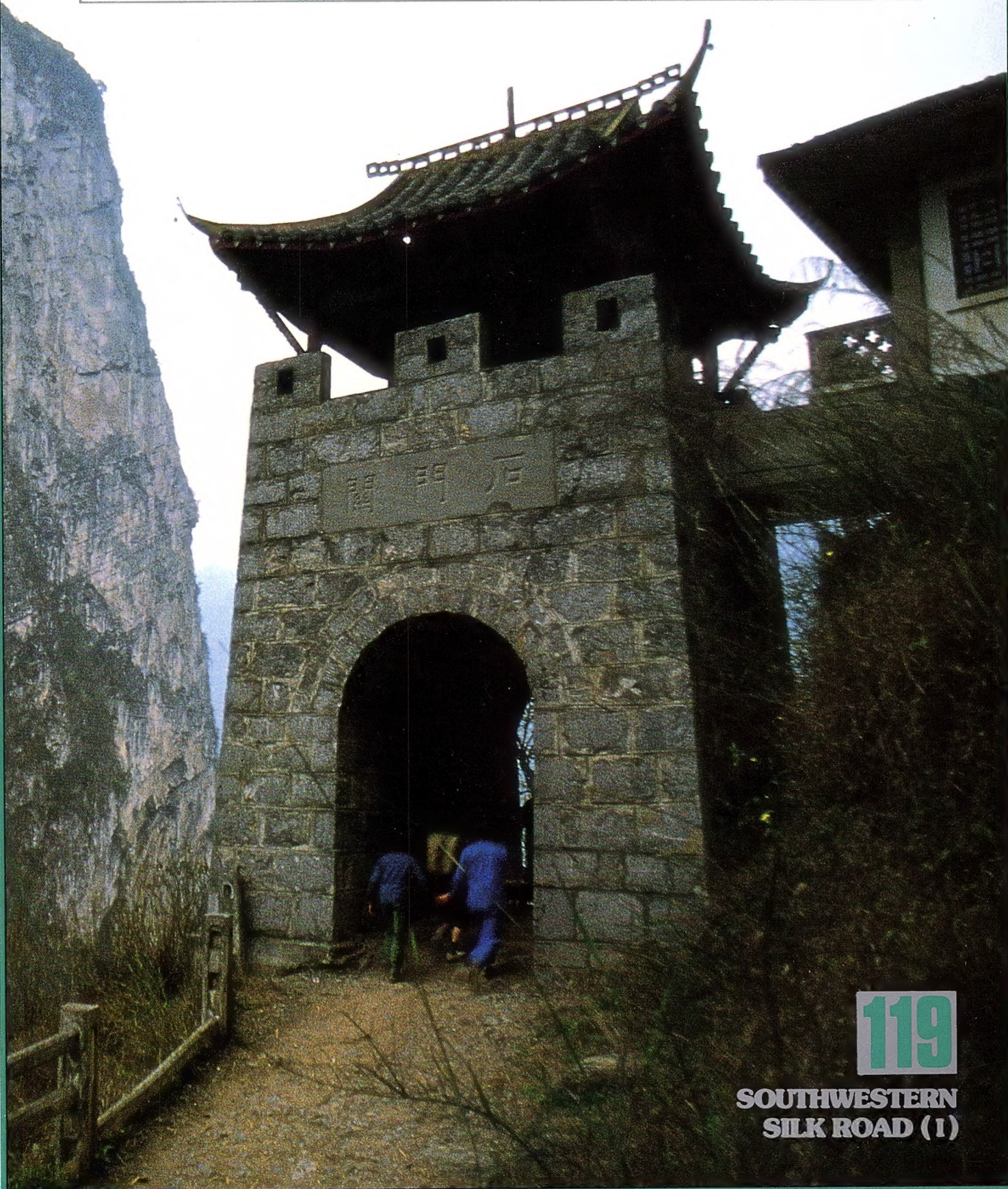


# China

T O U R I S M



119

**SOUTHWESTERN  
SILK ROAD (I)**

SILK ROAD IN SOUTHWEST • FIVE-CHI PATH • LINGGUAN ROUTE (I)





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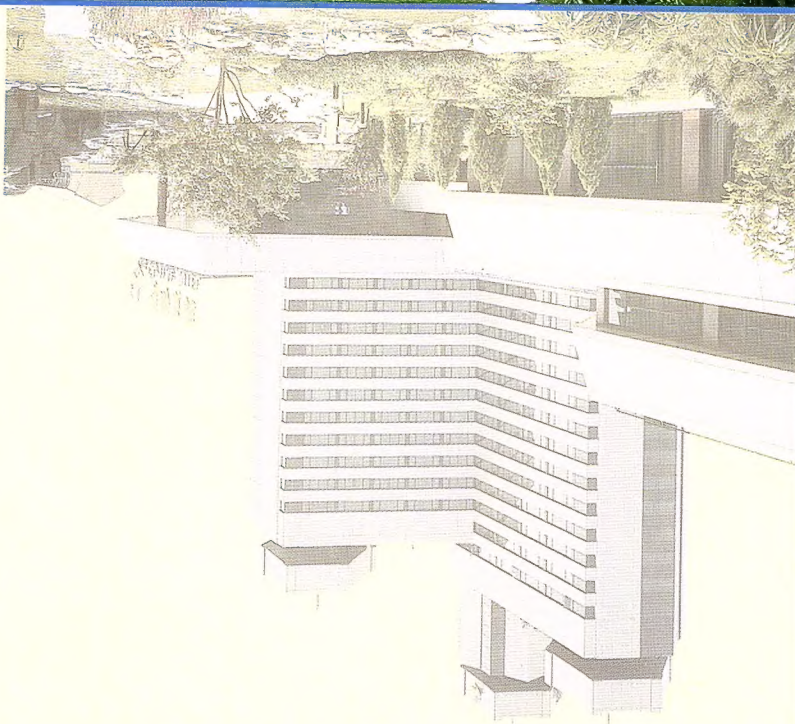
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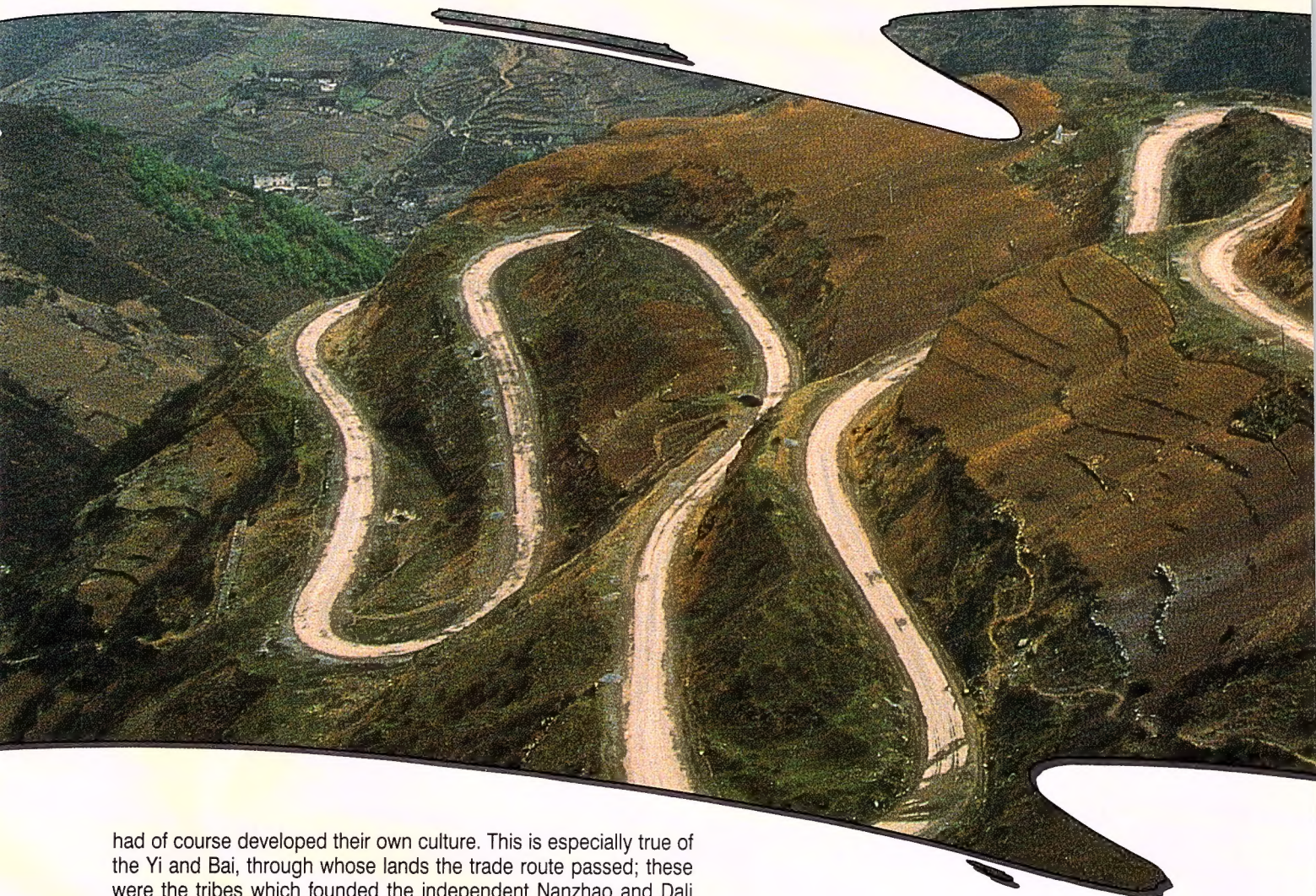
## In History's Steps

We present an issue devoted to the northern sections of what has become known as the Southwestern Silk Road. Last April our special photographer took a two-month trip along this forgotten route; her photos, in conjunction with articles by a researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, form the backbone of our Special Features articles.

This ancient trade route — which was probably already in existence by the fourth century B.C. — led from Sichuan through

Guizhou and Yunnan to Burma and beyond and would no doubt have developed piecemeal, different segments being added at different times by local traders for their convenience. The Bo people, for example, who were settled in southeastern Sichuan from around the fourth century B.C., are thought to have built a network of raised 'gallery' plank roads through their territory.

Although early Chinese historians tended to refer to the indigenous peoples of the southwest as 'barbarians', these peoples



had of course developed their own culture. This is especially true of the Yi and Bai, through whose lands the trade route passed; these were the tribes which founded the independent Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms (736–1253). An even earlier civilization was that of the Kingdom of Dian, which flourished from around 600–109 B.C. near Yunnan's Lake Dianchi. Those travelling through China's southwest today can still experience a mosaic of cultural backgrounds, despite extensive sinicization.

One bonus for foreign visitors is that Marco Polo passed this way between 1280 and 1290 on behalf of the Yuan-dynasty founder, Kublai Khan. He noted many fascinating details in his *Travels*: he witnessed gold and silver changing hands in markets throughout the region and, further south, a thriving trade in slaves and eunuchs! Yet another link with the West is that the southwesterly end of this ancient route (covered in next month's issue) played a role in the Second World War as the Burma Road.

There is no problem in travelling between Chengdu, Kunming and Dali, and Luxi, capital of the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, is now officially open to foreign visitors. However, the current 'open' status of places closer to the Sino-Burmese border remains unclear. For all sorts of reasons, it seems unlikely that foreigners will be allowed to cross from Yunnan into Burma in the foreseeable future.

But this Southwestern Silk Road through luxuriant subtropical scenery, across green mountains and raging rivers, would certainly provide a fine contrast for anybody who has braved the waterless wastes and the sandstorms of the better-known Silk Road through Gansu and Xinjiang!



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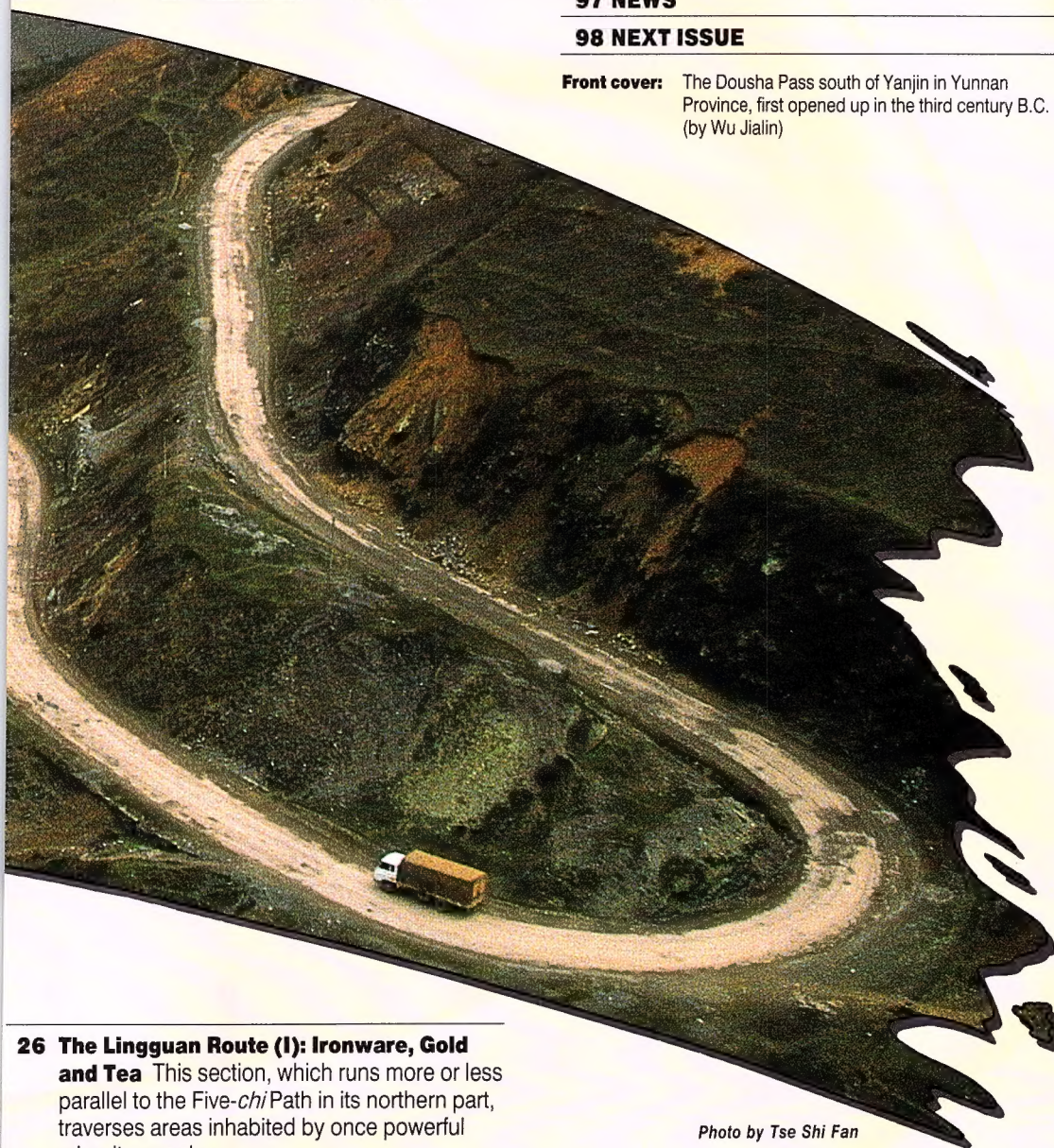


Photo by Tse Shi Fan

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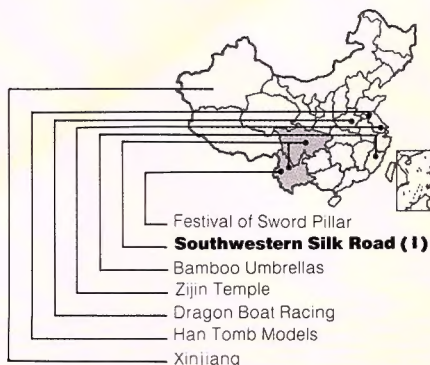
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# Silk Road in China's Southwest

**W**hen there is mention of the Silk Road, most people immediately think of the trade routes which ran across the deserts and mountains of northwestern China and Central Asia through Persia to the shores of the Mediterranean. But, actually, there was a route in southwestern China just as ancient as these.

The *Shi Ji* (*Records of the Historian*), compiled by Sima Qian (born in 145 or 135 B.C.), and the *Han Shu* (*History of the Han Dynasty*), compiled by Ban Gu (32-92), both refer to such a road. During the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 24) Zhang Qian was sent as an envoy by Emperor Wudi to the Western Regions. On his return to the dynastic capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in 126 B.C. he reported that, during his stay in Daxia (Bactriana, in today's northern Afghanistan), he had seen bolts of cloth from Shu (present-day Sichuan). Upon inquiry he learned that the goods had been brought by Daxia merchants from Shendu (today's India) several thousand kilometres to the southeast. Calculating that Shendu could not be too far from Shu, Zhang Qian suggested that the emperor should send a mission to find out more about a possible trade route ... which the emperor duly did. But the road is thought to have already been in existence by the fourth century B.C. Called the 'Shu-Shendu Road' in the Han dynasty, it was not of course a single road in the modern sense any more than the Silk Road of the northwest was. It was a series of paths, bridleways and mountain tracks and very few – if any – of those using it would have travelled its entire length.

From Chengdu, long noted for its silks and brocades, and linked with the centres of power further north by the so-called 'Gallery Road', it ran through Guizhou and Yunnan into Burma, terminating somewhere in the northeastern part of the Indian sub-continent, probably at a port. Its 3,000-kilometre course within the present-day boundaries of China can be considered as three sections, the Five-*chi* Path, the Lingguan Route, and the Yongchang Route.

Apart from Chengdu and Yibin in the Sichuan Basin and the Kunming Plain, the Southwestern Silk Road had to overcome difficult and mountainous terrain. It traversed the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau at an average altitude of one to two thousand metres above sea-level. On top of that, merchants and their caravans would have had to ford sundry large and turbulent rivers, all running through deep gorges.

In view of the many difficulties, trade must have been lucrative indeed to persuade traders and merchants to open up the route and to continue using it throughout the centuries. Merchant caravans carried silk, cloth, porcelain, ironware, lacquerware and tea – either on pack horses and mules or using human porters – to India and Burma, bringing back jewels (including pearls), seashells – probably the cowries which were a form of currency – and other goods. 

Translated by Anne Yan



Lingguan  
Route

Five-*chi*  
Path

Yongchang  
Route





四川  
Sichuan

雲南  
Yunnan

貴州  
Guizhou

廣西  
Guangxi

成都  
Chengdu

蘆山  
Lushan

雅安  
Ya'an

青神  
Qingshen

樂山  
Leshan

漢源  
Hanyuan

甘洛  
Ganluo

越西  
Yuexi

喜德  
Xide

西昌  
Xichang

鹽源  
Yanyuan

德昌  
Dechang

會理  
Huili

拉祜  
Lazha

永仁  
Yongren

大姚  
Dayao

姚安  
Yao'an

賓川  
Binchuan

祥雲  
Xiangyun

大理  
Dali

昆明  
Kunming

楚雄  
Chuxiong

曲靖  
Qujing

貴陽  
Guiyang

威寧  
Weining

宣威  
Xuanwei

鹽津  
Yanjin

威信  
Weixin

珙縣  
Gongxian

宜賓  
Yibin

昭通  
Zhaotong

赫章  
Hezhang

會澤  
Huize

岷江  
Minjiang River

大渡河  
Dadu River

雅龍河  
Yalong River

長江  
Yangtze River

金沙江  
Jinsha River

蘭江  
Lancang River

Greater Xiangling Range

Lesser Xiangling Range

Greater Liangshan Mountains

斷山脈

金沙江

劍川  
Jianchuan

漾濞  
Yangbi

山  
sonan





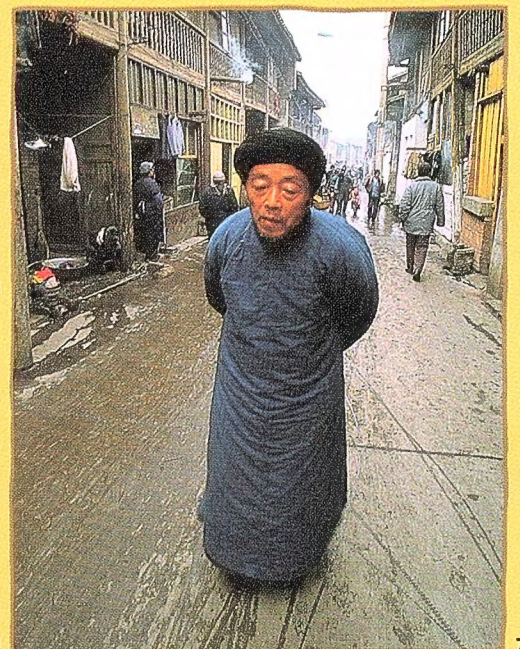
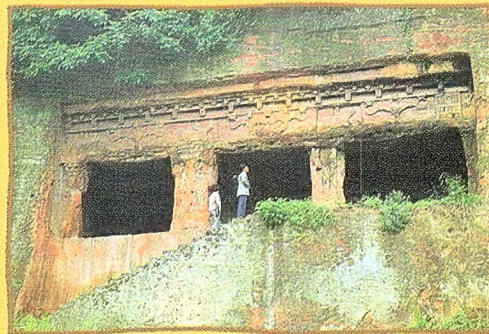
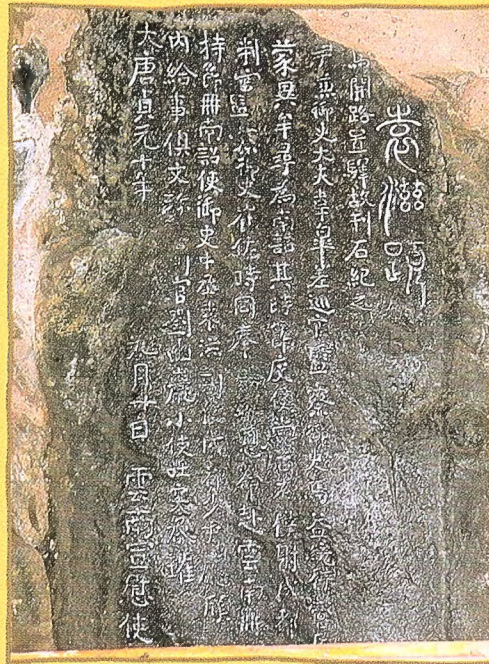


# Retracing the Five-*chi* Path from Chengdu to Dali

PHOTOS BY WANG MIAO ARTICLE BY XU YE

‘**A**t the time of the Qin, Chang E opened up a path five *chi* (feet) wide through these lands and set up administrative posts. A dozen years later, the Qin emperor fell. With the coming of the Han dynasty, these lands were abandoned and the Shu road opened as before. The merchants of Shu still went out to trade, buying horses from the Zuo, slaves from the Bo, as well as yaks, which represented one of Shu’s sources of wealth.’

— From ‘Biographies of the Southwestern Minority Peoples’ in *Records of the Historian*, compiled by Sima Qian



In most places, the old path is really little more than 1.5 metres wide (1). Witnesses to antiquity, the Tang-dynasty inscription at Dousha Pass (2), Bo gallery tomb near Yibin (3, by Chan Yat Nin), inscribed relic found at Huize (4), Ming bronzes in the Chengdu Museum (5), and Shu brocade in a Ming-dynasty pattern (6). Many elderly people in Zhaotong still favour the traditional long blue gown (7) (2 and 7 by Wu Jialin).





# Home of Sericulture







cade according to a pattern dating back to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The weaver perched on the upper level of the loom was in charge of the design and the warp threads, while the one sitting on the lower level controlled eight bamboo poles with his feet, moving a shuttle left and right with his hands to produce the weft. I was told that it takes five days to make less than a metre of brocade.

The Five-*chi* Path, one of two possible routes in the northern part of this ancient trading road, actually ran from Yibin in southeastern Sichuan. Merchants used to ship their goods from Chengdu by water along the River Minjiang to Yibin, then continue by land.

***A replica Han-dynasty high loom in operation (1) and an example of Shu brocade (2). Stone carving (3), bronze rhinoceros – possibly a belt-hook (4), Han-dynasty figurine of a musician (5), and Han-dynasty brick carved with a farm scene (6) (3–6 by Chen Zhenge).***



3

What did the Shu fabric seen by Zhang Qian of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 24) in the kingdom of Daxia (in present-day northern Afghanistan) actually look like? Judging from the fact that Chengdu, capital of Sichuan

(ancient Shu), has long been noted for its sericulture, it may well have been similar to the *Shu jin* (brocade) we know today.

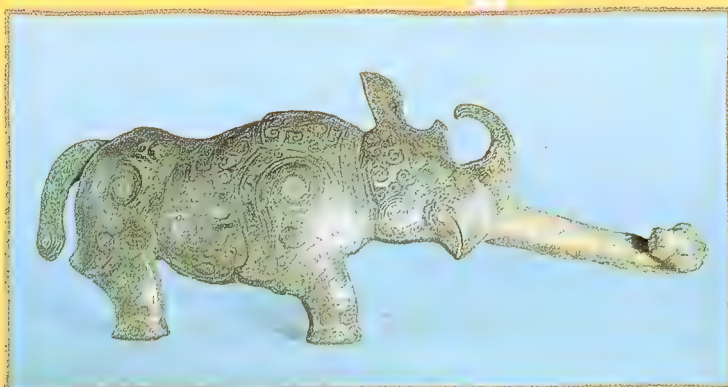
The ideograph for *shu* scratched in inscriptions on ancient tortoise shells and oracle bones used for divination is seemingly based on the shape of a silkworm. As evidenced by the archaeological findings in 1959 at Daxi in Wushan County, Sichuan was inhabited as early as the Neolithic period. However, it was not until the Xia dynasty (21st–16th century B.C.) that a tribe with a ruler named Can Cong first learned the secret of drawing the soft, resilient fibre from silkworm cocoons to be used as a material for weaving. Later, Can Cong conquered the centre and west of Sichuan and proclaimed himself King of Shu, which made him the 'Silkworm King'!

Today Shu brocade is mostly made using modern technology, but the ancient technique has not totally died out. At the Chengdu Shu Jin Mill on the south bank of the River Jinjiang in the city, it is possible to see a working replica of the Han-dynasty high loom.

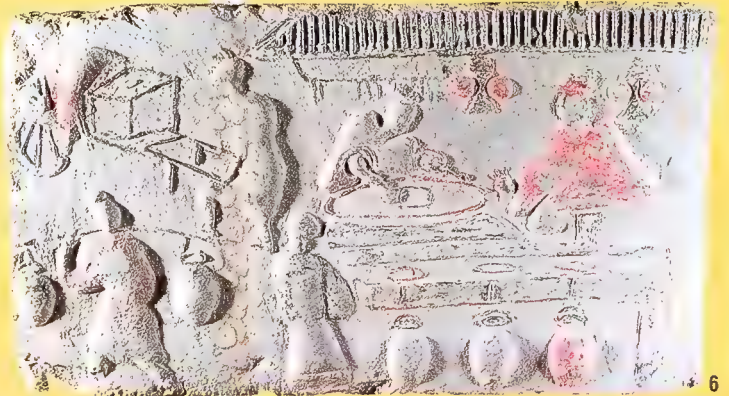
On the day we visited the mill, two veteran weavers were making Shu bro-



5



4



6





## From Qingshen to Qianwei





In the past, boats going down the Minjiang from Chengdu would stop at Qingshen for a meal and spend the first night there. They would leave for Jiazhou (present-day Leshan) the next morning. Qingshen, no longer a river port, sees few visitors nowadays.

We made a side trip by car to Ruifeng, also on the west bank of the Minjiang, from where we crossed the river on a wooden ferry to Zhongyan. This was a well-known beauty spot in ancient Sichuan, and was once described as 'the most wonderful spot among the woods and fountains of western Sichuan'. On the cliff we admired the Thousand-Buddha Gallery carved in the Song dynasty (960-1279). The Buddhas and other religious figures sit there on the cliff — as they have sat for centuries — looking out over the turbulent Minjiang.

This was a common practice in the past in Sichuan. Flooding being no less frequent and no less disastrous for the Yangtse and its tributaries than the Huanghe (Yellow River), the harnessing of the Minjiang — first with the Dujiang Weir at Guanxian, designed in around 250 B.C. — has been portrayed in paintings and recorded in history books. Moreover, as Buddhism spread, people



4

together propelling carts are said to be an age-old sight. Carts still roll along the main streets and back lanes, an ox pulling in front, its master steering from behind. By comparison, water transport is much more developed. Qianwei was linked up with the outside world long ago by waterways, and even when you travel by road, in many places you need to take a ferry across a river.

On the way south from Leshan we made a detour to the town of Luocheng in Qianwei County. The layout of Luocheng, built in the seventeenth century at the end of the Ming dynasty, is said to be unique; its main street, broad in the centre and narrow at both ends, is shaped like a huge fishing boat. We went there to see it for ourselves. The style is said to have aroused the interest of architects abroad, and a new quarter patterned on Luocheng has been built in Melbourne, Australia.

There were traders everywhere in Luocheng as it was a market day. People gathered to trade under a shady pavilion, with eaves five to six metres wide, sheltering both shops and stalls from sun and rain. The open space to left and right is so narrow that, when two people come from opposite directions, they have to turn sideways to pass.

According to historical research, Luocheng was one of the Qing dynasty's main courier staging posts, where emissaries and mail carriers would find lodging and food as well as fresh horses and porters, if necessary. In fact it used to be known as Luocheng Pu (*pu* meaning 'post'). However, as with every other market town along the length of the Minjiang, there is certainly no evidence nowadays of the once booming trade in silk and many other goods....

**An evil-dispelling monster hangs above a farmhouse door in Weixin (1). The Thousand-Buddha Gallery at Zhongyan (2) and the Thousand-Buddha 'Rock' at nearby Jiajiang (4). The Minjiang flows placidly on (3); here the market at Hengjiang south of Yibin (5) (2-5 by Wu Jialin).**

5

believed that strategically placed images of the Buddha could prevent the river from overflowing its banks. The most famous is to be found at Leshan, where the 71-metre-tall Great Buddha was commenced in 713 in the Tang dynasty.

There is an old story about how Qingshen got its name. Can Cong, the tribal ruler we mentioned earlier, is said to have gone among his people, dressed in a green robe, urging them to cultivate mulberry trees and raise silkworms. After his death, he was deified and given the title 'Blessed Lord' and 'Green-Robed Lord of the Locality'. A shrine in his honour was set up in the town which, in 579 in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386-589) was named Qingshen — literally, 'God in Green'. In the mid-seventeenth century, the early Qing, most people here grew mulberries and were engaged in sericulture as described by someone living at that time:

*Mulberry trees under the walls,  
Silkworms in the halls —  
Such is the common scene there.*

About sixty kilometres from Leshan is Qianwei, where the traditional way of transport remains unchanged. Man and beast



3





## Age-Old Distillery Town







seen in Yibin District's Gongxian County. Some historians believe that, even before the construction of the Five-*chi* Path, the Bo had already built plank or 'gallery' roads through the region.

Yibin has since antiquity been a turnover point for goods from Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou. Today, advertisements for wine and spirits can be seen all over the town, the most common being for Wuliang Ye (Five-Grain Liquor), a local product.

In the distillery on Gulou (Drum Tower) Street the smell of fermenting grain is overpowering. The cellars are more than six hundred years old. The huge liquor vat, wheelbarrows and giant bamboo baskets for transporting the draff give you the impression that the entire traditional process is alive and kicking. But at Hongmiaozi, on the outskirts of the town, the same brand of alcohol is produced by a modern industrial method.

The five grains involved in making Wuliang Ye are rice, glutinous rice, maize, wheat and sorghum. The method used was invented by the Bo some two thousand years ago, when they discovered that the fruits of the betel pepper could ferment spontaneously. By the Ming dynasty, spirit distillers and traders had begun to organize themselves in Yibin, the most distinguished among them being Wendefeng, whose alcohol was a forerunner of today's Wuliang Ye.

***Scrubbing down at Yibin's old liquor distillery (1, by Xu Puyan), and hanging coffins of the Bo in situ at Gongxian (2). Across the wide River Jinsha lies Yunnan (3) (2 and 3 by Wu Jialin).***

Yibin, where the Minjiang merges with the River Jinsha to form the Yangtse, is the real start of the Five-*chi* Path. In the third century Zhuge Liang, the Shu general, extended the Five-*chi* Path to Kunming. And during the Sui dynasty (581-618) the surface of the path — thereafter known as the Shimen (Stone Gate) Path — was widened. At the end of the eighth century during the Tang dynasty, the road was extended to Dali in Yunnan.

The area around Yibin was known in the Han dynasty as the Bo State, since the Bo had been concentrated here from the fourth century B.C. In fact, this people grew so strong that the Ming court became alarmed by their power and fought many battles against them. The Bo's disappearance during the Wanli reign (1573-1620) remains a mystery. However, their hanging coffins can still be







## Weixin in the Wumeng Range







The route continues across the River Jinsha and beyond Gongxian. According to researchers, a branch of the Five-*chi* Path once led to Weixin in the Wumeng Mountains in Yunnan. However, the line of the old road has long since been abandoned and we had no option but to drive direct to Weixin along the modern road.

Spring showers accompanied us as our car entered the mountain region. Outside the windows, the views were lost in the mist and the wheels skidded frequently on the muddy road, keeping us on the edge of our seats.

On a hilltop not far from the county town of Weixin we saw a fortress-like building in the distance. Later we discovered it had been built by local people as a measure of protection against bandit raids. Bandits used to haunt all this area in the old days.

Tucked away off the beaten track in the mountains, Weixin is a quiet place today, with lots of old wooden houses in the traditional style. But, in the northeastern part of the town, there is a Qing-dynasty guild hall for natives of Jiangxi, reminding us that Weixin did once play host to merchants from far and wide. A guild hall was a place where people from a certain province, prefecture or county, especially members of the same guild or trade, could stay when they were travelling on business, a sort of early business executives' hotel. Today the guild hall, in Weixin houses the Cultural Relics Museum.

***A jovial stone Buddha in Weixin (1), the town which hosted Mao Zedong's 'Zhaxi Conference': the teahouse is named accordingly (2) (both by Tse Shi Fan). The fortification in the hills outside Weixin was once much-needed protection against bandits (3).***

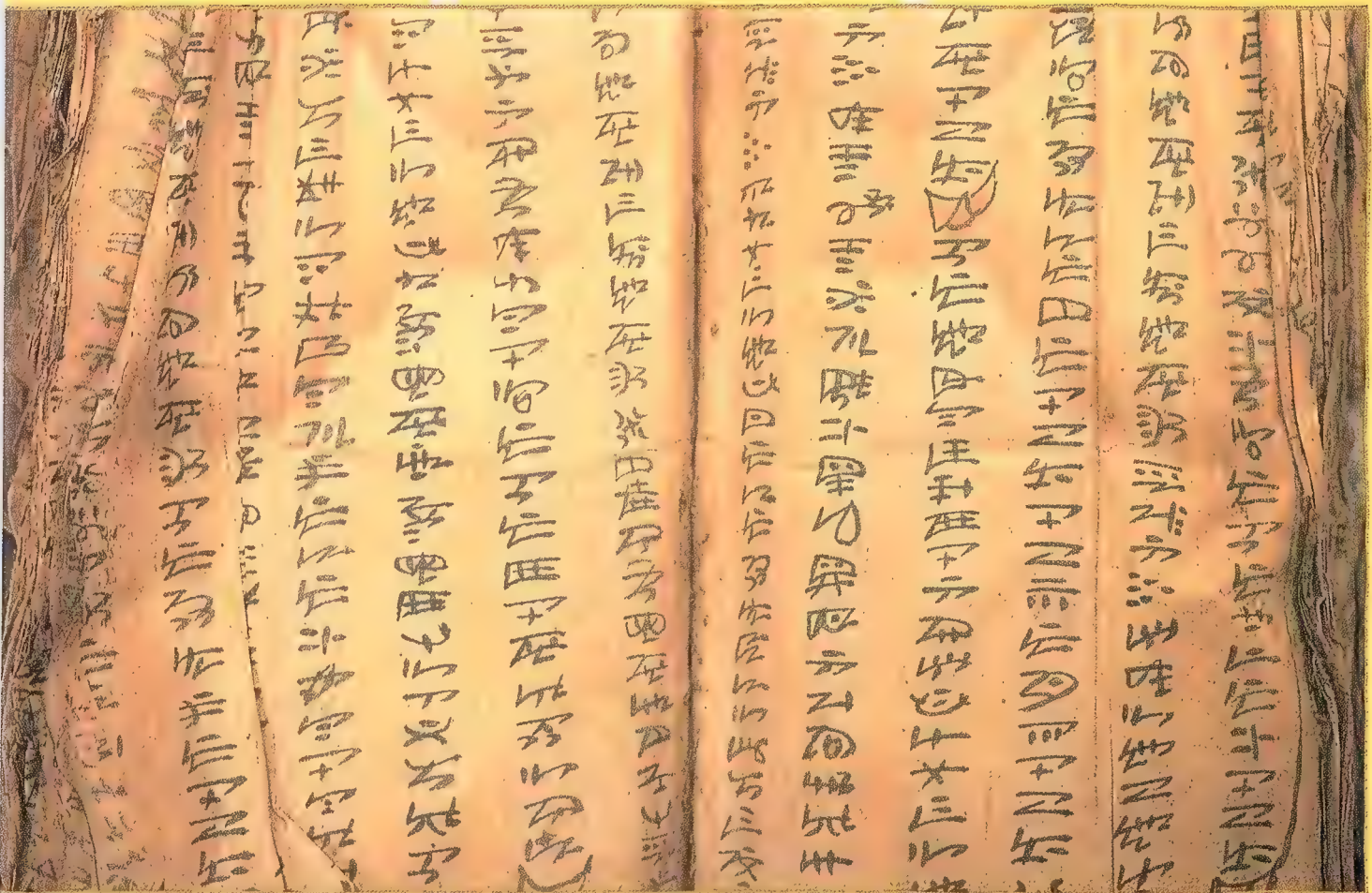




## Yanjin and Dousha Pass







2

We retraced our steps to the main Five-*chi* Path and continued to Yanjin just over the border in Yunnan along what must have been one of the most dangerous parts of the whole journey. The plank road has a cliff on one side and the sky on the other.

Built on both sides of the River Guanhe, Yanjin was originally a staging post for couriers, like so many other towns along this route. With the passage of time, a township grew up here. Among the dwellings on the eastern bank of the river, we found a stone marker bearing the characters 'Ancient Road of Shimen Leading to Nanzhao'. The locals call this the 'Five-*chi* Path Marker'.

Atop Mount Yidu not far from Yanjin we looked out over a vast expanse of field terraces planted with yellow rape and purple-flowered sweet peas and broad beans. Concealed among palms and bamboos here is the tomb of a leader of the Yi people, A Shao, on whom the Song dynasty conferred the title King of Wumeng.

Twenty kilometres south of Yanjin lies the Dousha Pass. A passage in the *Annals of Yunnan* by Fan Chuo of the Tang dynasty describes it thus: 'The precipice east of Shimen has a cliff wall rising 10,000 *ren* (one *ren* was equivalent to two metres) skyward with the river of Zhuti running down below. This wall also

goes down several hundred *chi* (feet) to the ground with the sound of running water quite audible, although it is impossible for men to get down there. The precipice in the west is another stone wall and on the precipice there is a plank road one *bu* (equivalent to 1.5 metres) in width and some thirty *li* (one *li* equals half a kilometre) in length, half of it suspended in the air in a dangerously tilting position.'

The pass was opened up in the third century B.C. Two buildings erected at a later date stand on either side of the pass.

The tower to the south would have been a blockhouse for the garrison, while north of the pass is a pavilion housing a Tang-dynasty stone inscription by one Yuan Zi. It gives an account of his mission to the Nanzhao Kingdom in 794, in an effort to pacify the frontier region, with orders to confer the title of prince on the Nanzhao ruler.

**The Dousha Pass near Yanjin (1, by Wu Jialin). An ancient Yi text (2) and the site of the Yi ruler A Shao's tomb on Mount Yidu (3).**



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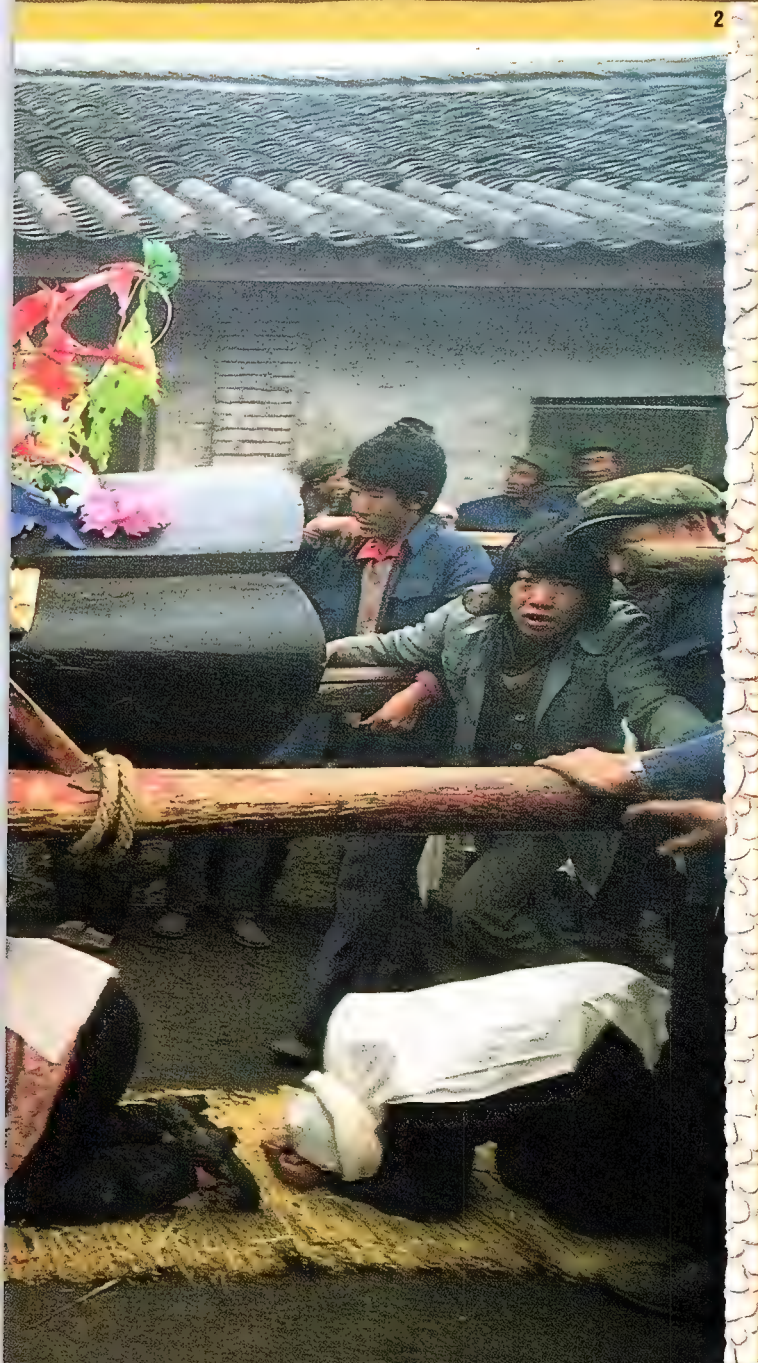
## Zhaotong: Central Plains Influences







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Beyond Dousha Pass, over Mount Lingzikou, the Five-*chi* Path continued to Zhaotong, known as the 'Ten-*li* Great Flatland' in the eighteenth century. In the second century B.C., during the reign of Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty, it was called Zhuti.

A local friend first took us to Zhaotong Middle School, the site of frescoes from the tomb of Huo Chengsi, a marquis of Chengdu in the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). The frescoes are in a building topped with a large dome. One of the frescoes with a dragon as the main theme shows four rows of human figures. Those in the second and third rows are clearly identifiable as Yi people because of their hair worn in a bun and the black and white robes that mark them out as of the Black (ruling) or White (subordinate) caste. Han Chinese soldiers with sticks are portrayed in the first row, mounted horsemen in the fourth. It is believed that this shows that Huo Chengsi – the tomb occupant – had servants of both Han Chinese and Yi stock, although of course there could well be other interpretations.

We took an evening stroll through Zhaotong. It was extremely cold, but the foodstalls in the streets were doing good business. There was a most appetizing smell of baked sweet potatoes, stuffed pastries and steamed maize. Here, the market is busiest at night, unlike most markets elsewhere in Yunnan, which usually only run until noon.

As a town of some importance on the Five-*chi* Path, Zhaotong was a caravan assembly and dispersal point, a hub of communications between the southwest and the Central Plains. As more and more Han Chinese were sent south as colonists to consolidate the frontier regions and establish the Han dynasty's power there, they introduced their own economic system, customs and cultural values.

***Both Yi and Han Chinese appear in a fresco in Huo Chengsi's tomb (1) at Zhaotong, where funeral rites such as 'carrying the coffin' (2) display the influence of the Central Plains. Traversing the eerie slopes of Mount Dashanbao (3).***





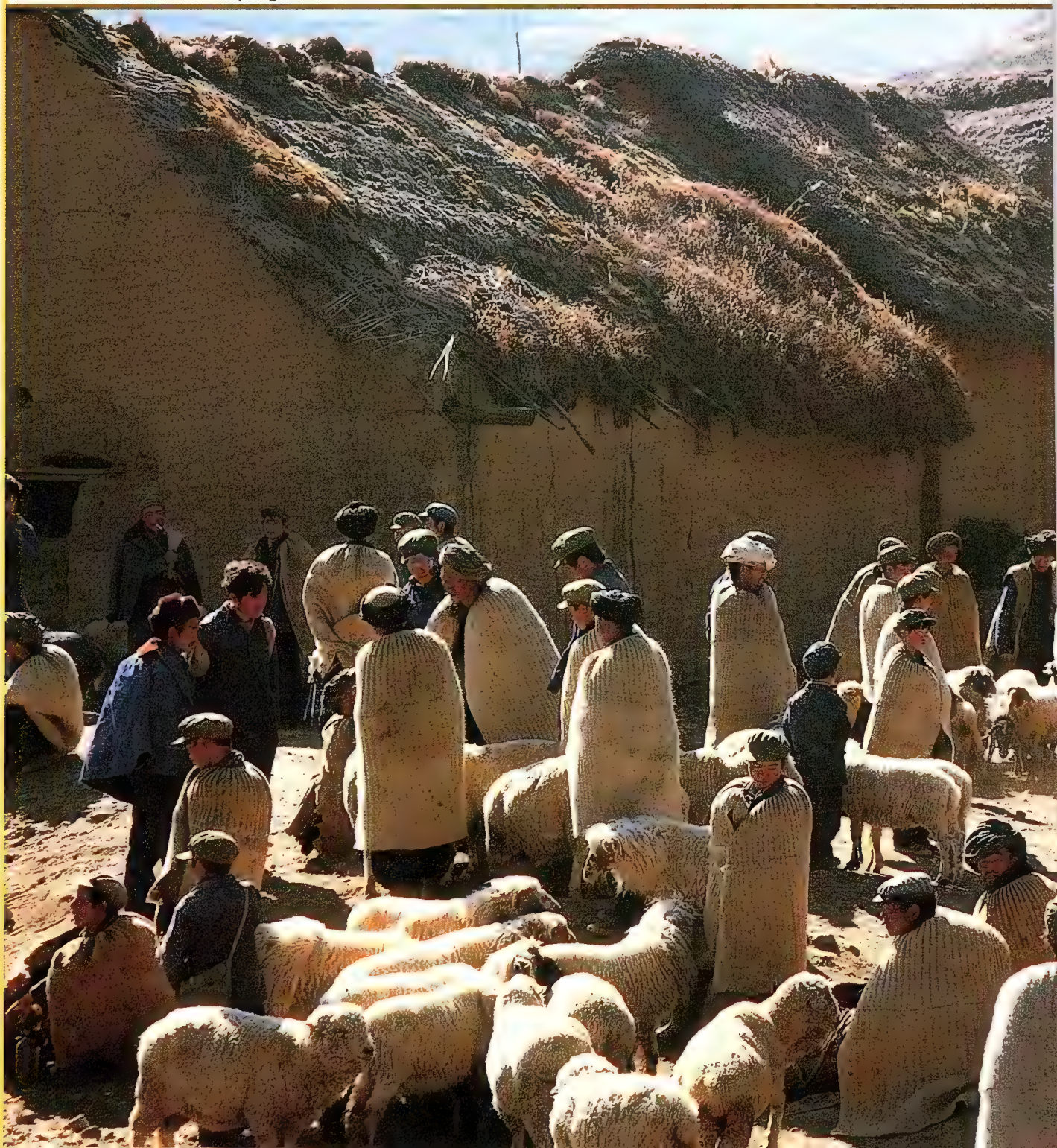
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In most rural places in the area, 'beating drums to get rid of weeds' — a tradition of the Central Plains — is still very much alive. In the spring, local farmers sing as they weed their fields to the beat of a drum.

Like towns on the Central Plains, Zhaotong buries its dead. In the villages, the burial and the associated rites are performed by an undertaker. Before the coffin is removed from the deceased's house, the undertaker first uses a kitchen knife to chop a big bowl filled with water into pieces. Next he pierces the left thumb of the dead person's eldest son, then uses the blood to make a mark on the ancestral tablet, a ceremony known as 'leaving a spot on the ancestor'. The tablet is then handed to the eldest son, who places it on the family altar in his own home. Another important ceremony is known as 'carrying the coffin'. The deceased's



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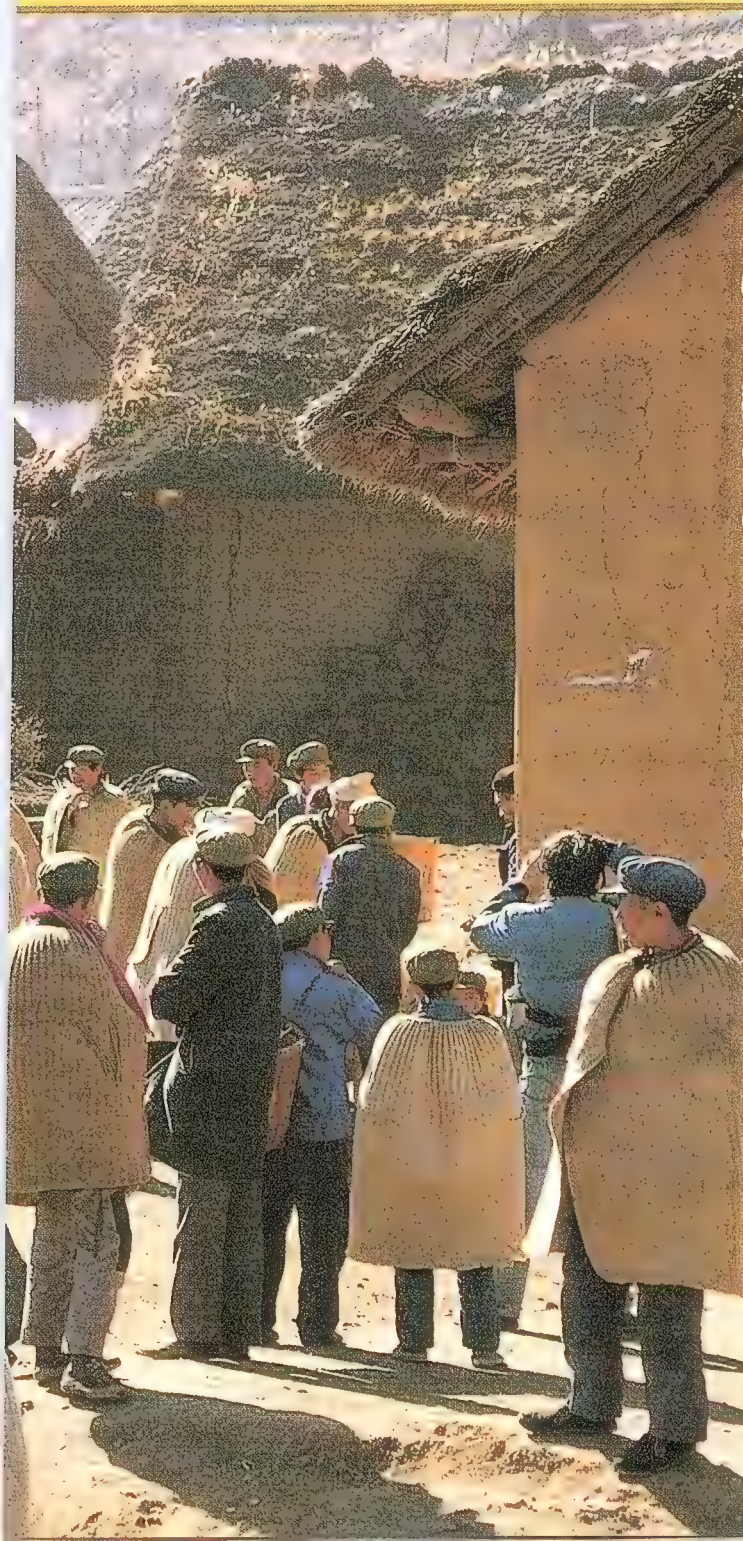




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children and grandchildren kneel down, and the sixteen strong men carrying the coffin move it three times backwards and forwards over their bowed backs by way of a final farewell to the deceased. On the way to the graveyard, the funeral procession is headed by a paper figure with a silver spear. This is the 'deity who opens the way', supposedly with the power to keep away evil spirits. Those in the procession also carry horses, safes and so on — all of paper — for the deceased's convenience in the other world.

These funeral customs of the Central Plains were introduced to the southwestern border region through post and trade roads such as the Five-chi Path. Although the roads later changed their course, the old customs have become ingrained and are passed down from generation to generation.



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The Zhaotong area is rich in mineral deposits such as silver and copper. At the end of the Western Han, Wang Mang, a nephew of the wife of Emperor Yuandi, usurped the throne as imperial regent in the year 6 and, three years later, founded the so-called Xin dynasty. Zhaotong (as Zhuti) was already a noted producer of silver, which Wang Mang used to mint his coins as part of his sweeping reforms during the interregnum before the Eastern Han resumed power. He even officially established the Zhuti silver coin as sixty percent higher in value than silver coins minted elsewhere. This is an indication of the quality and the quantity of silver produced here.

Mount Dashanbao, about seventy kilometres from Zhaotong along a rough track, presents a unique landscape. It is dusty and the wind blows hard, creating a sombre atmosphere on this plateau in northeastern Yunnan. Not many people live in the area except for herdsmen and shepherds. Practically everyone wears a knee-length cape of thick, felted wool to keep out the cutting wind.

**Bronze bell found at Zhaotong, bearing the bamboo totem of ancient Yelang (1), and Zhuti silver ingot shaped like a horseshoe (2). The shepherds of the area all wear heavy cloaks (3) (1 and 3 by Tse Shi Fan). A cemetery in the vicinity of Zhaotong (5), where even a headdress reflects the intermingling of Yi and Han Chinese cultures (4, by Yang Huayue).**



# Huize and Its White Copper





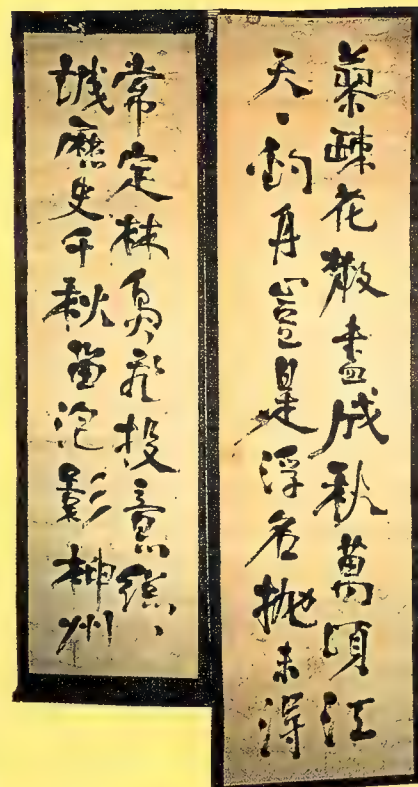
Dashanbao is one of the peaks of the Wumeng Mountains, but the main peak — Dahailiangzi, 3,155 metres above sea-level — is located not in Zhaotong County, but in Huize County further south.



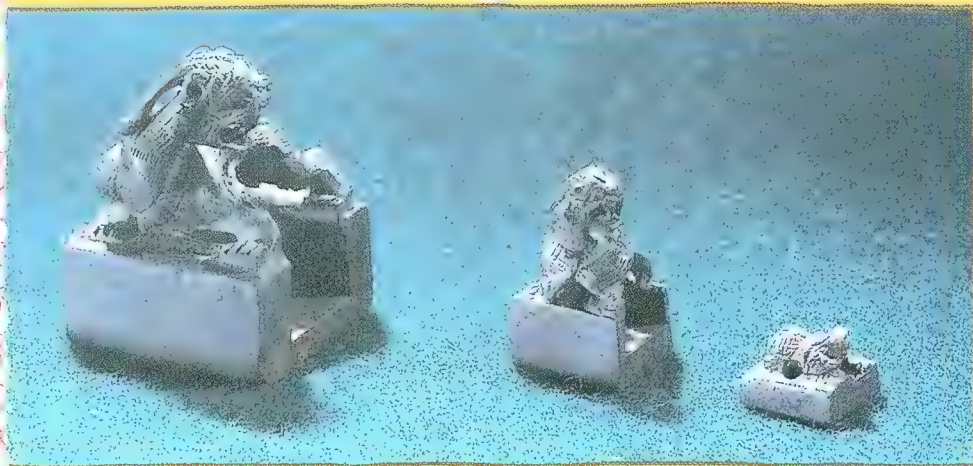
Dahailiangzi, all the houses are made of stone. Blue-grey slates are used as roof tiles. At first glance the village and the mountain are indistinguishable, tone on tone. Trees are few and far between in the fields outside the village and the yellow slopes extend as far as the eye can see. The typical landforms in the Wumeng Range are rounded, rolling uplands, so you do not get an impression of imposing heights (see CHINA TOURISM no. 111).

At the County Cultural Hall in Huize, almost three-quarters of the objects on display are made of copper. In the Western Han dynasty Huize was part of Tanglang County, and both Tanglang and Zhuti were renowned for their copperware. By the time of the Western Jin (265–317), Huize craftsmen had succeeded in mixing nickel with copper to produce an alloy, the world's earliest of its kind, fifteen centuries ahead of any European country.

Huize and its valuable copper naturally attracted many merchants. It was always a major stop on the Five-chi Path and, by the Qing dynasty, there were at least four



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<sup>3</sup> This Wumeng Range sprawls across northwestern Guizhou and northern Yunnan on a northeast-southwest axis at an average altitude of about 2,500 metres above sea-level.

At the village of Dahai on Mount roads connecting it with neighbouring Sichuan and Guizhou. A tablet with an inscription giving an account of the restoration of a post road in the Qing dynasty is now kept in Huize's Cultural Hall. The inscription reads: 'Tanglang is a county with a vast territory adjoining Sichuan and Guizhou, a place where merchants converge. It ships copper to the capital to a value of no less than several million and also controls the road for shipment.'

Merchants from other provinces flooded to Huize and guild halls for people from Jiangxi, Hunan and Sichuan were built one after the other. There were more than seventy at the peak of the copper trade. Today there is just one, the Jiangxi Guild Hall, to be found in a small lane off West Street in Huize. Built in 1711 in the Kangxi reign, it consists of a group of buildings, the most unusual of which is a

theatre. The guild hall is currently under-going repair.

Between the second and third lanes off the same street is the Tang Mansion, the country home of Tang Jiyao, a warlord of the erstwhile Yunnan Army formed following the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916 when the young republic was in chaos. After his studies in Japan, Tang Jiyao returned to China to become military governor of Guizhou and subsequently also of Yunnan. He died in Kunming in 1927.

**Slate-covered homes on Dahailiangzi, the main peak of the Wumeng Mountains (1). Han-dynasty bricks carved with ancient characters (2) and the twentieth-century calligraphy of Tang Jiyao (4); the present occupant of his former residence in Huize (3). A set of seals excavated locally (5).**





## Weining in Ancient Yelang

Curving back to the southeast, the Five-*chi* Path runs into what was the western part of the Yelang Kingdom, the counties of Weining and Hezhang in northwestern Guizhou. During the Qi and Western Han dynasties Yelang held a fairly large tract of territory covering present-day northwestern Guizhou, northeastern Yunnan, southern Sichuan and parts of northwestern Guangxi. It



*The traditionally cured ham (2) of Xuanwei – a land of rich red soil (1) – has earned itself a good reputation over the centuries. The modern bas-relief at Gujing depicts Zhuge Liang's southern campaign (3), and an old-fashioned way of dressing recalls past styles of the Central Plains (4).*



king became a byword for parochial naivety and arrogance after he once asked a Han-dynasty envoy: 'Whose country is larger, the Han ruler's or mine?'

There is another story which was once popular in Yelang. Once upon a time, a woman found a large piece of bamboo in the River Dunshui (now the Beipan). When she split it open, she discovered that the bamboo contained a baby boy. The boy grew up to become the king of Yelang and took Zhu (*zhu* means bamboo) as his family name. The piece of bamboo in which he was first found, cast aside in a field, grew into a luxuriant bamboo grove, and bamboo became the totem of his kingdom.

A bronze bell with a bamboo pattern on it has been unearthed at Zhaotong, possibly a Yelang relic. And bronze daggers, shells, water containers and earthenware unearthed near Lake Caohai in Weining all speak for the formidable economic strength of Yelang. In an effort to promote trade with these rich 'barbarians', Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty widened the plank road into a proper post road and set up hostels along it to provide merchants with food and lodgings.

In more recent times, Weining has become famous as a source of supply for the pigs with which Xuanwei makes its ham. This ham has a history of more than 250 years. It found its way to the major regional markets of Kunming and Chengdu by the Ming dynasty and, by the end of the Qing dynasty, was being despatched to commercial ports all over China. In the past, ham was made by every household. Today, besides factories mass-producing it, there are farmers in Hongqiao, south of Xuanwei, who continue to salt and air-dry ham in the old way. Some households erect a special two-storey building for the purpose. These buildings are deliberately dark but well-ventilated, and may contain dozens of hams, each weighing around nine kilos, at different stages.





# Qujing

The Five-*chi* Path continues south to Qujing, where there is a modern bas-relief carving about twenty metres long. This portrays scenes of the military campaigns launched in and around Qujing by Zhuge Liang (181–234), prime minister

southwest jumped at this opportunity to regain control of their own areas. To quell the uprising, Zhuge Liang in 225 led his troops on an expedition south against Meng Huo, capturing the tribal leader seven times and seven times letting him



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and general of the Kingdom of Shu in the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280).

In the year 223 Liu Bei, the Shu ruler, died from an illness at Baidicheng (now Fengjie) in Sichuan. The tribes of the

go, which finally induced the latter to concede victory.

It is interesting to note that the people here used both tripods and drums in rituals as long ago as the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (722–221 B.C.). Drums were highly treasured musical instruments but also status symbols for many of the ethnic groups of southwestern China and Southeast Asia. However, tripods were major ritual implements at the ruling courts of the Han Chinese of the Central Plains. Some experts believe that the appearance of both in the area of Qujing implies that Han Chinese culture had already spread very early on to Yunnan.

Heading southwest beyond Qujing, the Five-*chi* Path soon reaches Kunming, one-time capital of the powerful kingdom of Dian, which gave its name to Lake Dianchi. The kingdom, which had a complex slave culture and which has produced many remarkable bronze artefacts, was crushed by Han-dynasty forces in 109 B.C. At Kunming the road turns due west and runs via Chuxiong across central Yunnan to Dali.

In all, we touched on three provinces — Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan — and travelled 2,500 kilometres to cover the line of the Five-*chi* Path. 

Translated by Ren Jiazhen



SOUTHWESTERN SILK ROAD (I)

# The Lingguan Route (I)

## Ironware, Gold and Tea

PHOTOS BY WANG MIAO    ARTICLE BY XU Y



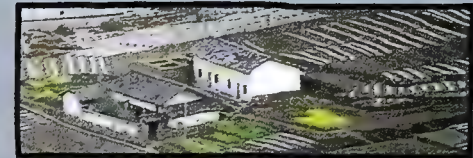
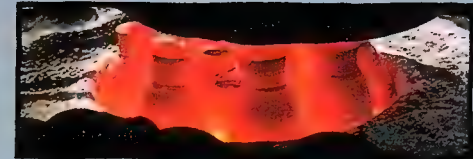
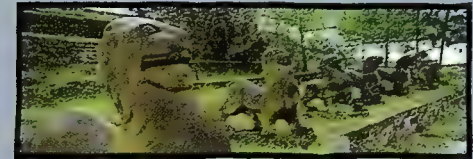


According to *Zi Zhi Tong Jian*\* (*History as a Mirror*), the Lingguan Route was opened up so that the famous man of letters Sima Xiangru (179–118 B.C.), a native of Chengdu, could reach his new posting in southwest China when he was appointed marshal of the imperial guards by Emperor Wudi in 130 B.C. Since the road crossed Mount Lingshan via the Lingguan Pass, it was named accordingly. In this issue we look at the first part – the northern half – of this route as far as the Yunnan border, including coverage in CHINA TOURISM no. 120.

A book compiled by Sima Guang in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). The work covers history, politics, military affairs, economy and culture from 403 B.C. to A.D. 959 and was completed 1084 after nineteen years of effort.



A horse caravan crosses the River Dadu by the suspension bridge





# Qionglai

The Lingguan Route initially leads west from Chengdu to Qionglai. Known as Lingqiong in ancient times, this county town is situated in the western part of the Chengdu Plain. It used to be a residential area for the wealthy. Even today, a street ten kilometres long lined with shops runs through the town.

Qionglai was once a well-known iron town because of its advanced metallurgy and because of Mount Qionglai's rich resources of iron ore. The ironware manufactured here was solid and hard-



wearing, and it sold very well throughout the southwest.

Our car crawled across Mount Qionglai and Mount Zhenxi and through the Qinglong (Green Dragon) Pass to Mount Lingjiu, the former Lingshan. This is the site of the famous Lingguan Pass, a valley four kilometres long. Sima Xiangru left his mark here by carving an inscription on a rock.

**The head of the 'First Southern Sichuan Bridge' at Qionglai, starting point for merchants travelling south (1), and a stone tomb guardian from the Eastern Han (2). Peace of mind is a good, solid coffin (3)! Tea-pickers on Mount Mengshan (4) and the Han-dynasty hut there where the first tea-grower is said to have rested from his labours (5). The Eastern Han sarcophagus at Lushan (6) and a mural suggesting the Han Chinese influence in the southwest (7).**

# Lushan



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From the Lingguan Pass we drove another eight kilometres to Lushan, a county town located on the upper reaches of the River Qingyi, after which it was once named. It has been an important hub of communication since early times and many relics excavated in its vicinity have indicated a connection with the Lingguan Route. We paid a visit to the Museum of Stone Carvings of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) in the southern part of Lushan. On the lawn behind the museum eight stone animals, sculptures dating from the same dynasty, have been set up. You can just about identify a tiger, lion and sheep. Ten metres high and awe-inspiring, they were intended as tomb guardians.

Not very far from the museum a sarcophagus is displayed, said to be that of Wang Hui, a minister of finance under the Eastern Han. It consists of six large slabs of stone. The linked concave design on the stone lid is said to indicate the infinity of the Milky Way. On the front panel, carved in relief, is the vermilion bird (symbol of the south and of summer), on the back the 'dark warrior' (symbol of the north and of winter), on the left the green dragon (symbol of the east and of spring), and on the right the white tiger (symbol of the west and of autumn). The 'dark warrior' is depicted as a tortoise or turtle entwined with a snake. It is said that there are no male turtles, so they cannot reproduce unless they mate with a snake.

Heading south for eighteen kilometres along the River Qingyi, we came to an ancient pass called Feixian, an important place on the old road from Sichuan to Tibet. Shortly afterwards, Mount Mengshan came into sight in the distance. A sort of transitional point between the Sichuan Basin and the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, this mountain 1,440 metres high is ideal for tea-growing owing to its acidic soil. From the time of the Tang dynasty (618-907), the tea grown here used to be sent in its entirety to the capital (then Chang'an, present-day Xi'an in Shaanxi) for the exclusive delectation of the imperial household. It was considered so precious that even the emperor rarely treated himself to it. It was reserved for special occasions and was used as a libation to heaven, the gods and the ancestors. As we drove over the mountain's slopes on a drizzly, foggy day, we saw girls busy plucking the tender leaves.

On top of one pass on the mountain we came across a strange sight: a two-metre-high stone sculpture in the middle of the road. It was erected here in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The paradoxical thing about it is that it is always wet at the top and bottom and dry in the middle, no matter whether the weather is fair or foul.







**Ya'an**





# Yingjing

It was nine o'clock in the evening before we reached Ya'an. Situated beside the River Qingyi, Ya'an is famous for its phenomenal rainfall, so abundant that it used to be nicknamed 'Heaven's Sieve'. People still say that it is never fine for three days on end in Ya'an.

This was the settlement area of two branches of the Qiang nationality, the Qingyi and the Maoni (Yak People), so it was often known as the Kingdom of the Qiang. These were some of the earliest inhabitants of northwestern China, having been mentioned already in the fourth century B.C. They form the basis for part of the Tibetan nationality.

In 223 B.C., when Qin defeated Chu, the future Emperor Shihuang of the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.) deported the Chu court to this area, known as Yandao at that time (the name Ya'an is a fairly recent acquisition from the Qing dynasty). One of the reasons behind the Qin ruler's decision to settle his old rivals here was that he wanted them to help in opening up a gold-prospecting area.

Since Ya'an does not have gold ore deposits, you may ask whether this was just a pipe dream. In fact, it has something to do with the local topography: high mountains are drained by many rivers flowing through deep gorges. In such a setting, it seems, gold dust is more likely to be washed down and deposited along the banks. As more and more gold prospectors rushed here, Ya'an or Yandao — with good transport connections both by water and by land — gradually became an important centre for the recovery of gold. It can be said with certainty that this promoted the development of the Southwestern Silk Road, since the roads had to be widened and kept in good repair for the imperial gold business.

Recently, a type of tree called the Yazhou mulberry, named after Mount Zhougong in Ya'an, was discovered in the neighbourhood. Generally, mulberry leaves are small and narrow; they have many twigs and berries and they take quite a long time to grow. But this Yazhou mulberry grows quickly, either planted directly in the soil or grafted on to existing mulberry trees with an eighty percent survival rate. Ya'an does not produce silk today but, judging from this newly discovered mulberry tree, as well as its climate, it may well have been a base for silk production in Sichuan in the past.

Its neighbour Yingjing is another town with a long history, having developed from a staging post on the Lingguan Route. In the days of Shihuang, it was the location of the Yandao government and later grew to become an indispensable fortress on what was then the border. Although its sturdy ramparts have not survived, an ancient skill has. This is the art of making earthenware casseroles, famous in the southwest two thousand years ago.



2

You can still sometimes see pedlars selling piles of black casseroles and other earthenware products by the roadside. According to one elderly female pedlar I spoke to, you can make a delicious meat and vegetable stew in such a casserole. And she promised I would never forget fish head stewed with beancurd if I cooked it in one of her earthenware casseroles! Just good sales talk?

Curious, we paid a visit to a local pottery and watched the workers at their pedal-operated turntables. The clay for the casseroles is said to be brought from the site of the ancient city of Yandao. Earthenware vessels were lined up beside the kiln waiting to be fired. One worker with a specially made heatproof hat jauntily stuck on his head was pulling out the red-hot casseroles from the kiln with a long pole.

***Rare sunshine at Ya'an (1), while red-hot earthenware casseroles emerge from the kiln at Yingjing (2).***



Not long after leaving Yingjing we came to a chain of mountains with grotesquely shaped crests — the Greater Xiangling Range — which both the ancient Lingguan Route and the modern Sichuan-Yunnan Highway are forced to cross. Once known as the Zeshan Mountains, they served as a sort of natural land barrier between the Han Chinese and the Yi peoples. They also separate the Chengdu Plain from the Xichang Valley. The range counts more than forty peaks over three thousand metres high.

The road zigzags over the mountain and is often blocked by landslips and rockslides. We ourselves were halted by one such on the road and had to wait for six hours — from noon to dusk — before we could continue. Finally we crawled off up the mountain in a long line of disgruntled travellers.

Half-way down the other side, beyond the Nibashan Pass, we reached the ancient town of Qingxi, site of a large garrison at one time. Trading caravans used to find this a welcome spot to break their journey, whether they were on their way up or down, and eventually a small commercial town grew up here.



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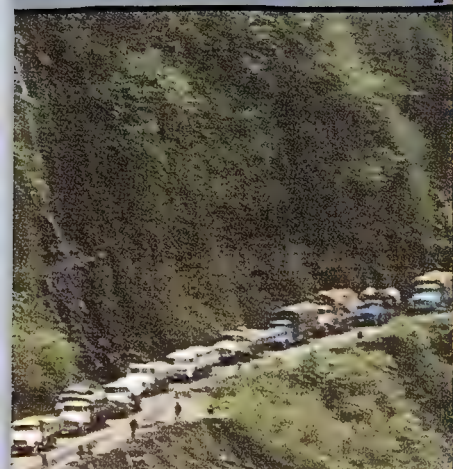




# Hanyuan



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At the foot of the Greater Xiangling Range surges the River Dadu, known as the Ruoshui in ancient times, a tributary of the Minjiang and thus of the Yangtse. We crossed its turbulence by an iron chain bridge south of a town called Hanyuan and then headed alongside Mount Longtang to the Shaijing Pass. At this point, the Lingguan Route turned south towards the Henan staging post. Caravans would leave Hanyuan early in the morning to make it this far before their lunch stop. Gradually the drovers developed the saying: 'If you want to eat, go to the Henan Post'.

This section of the road is still intact, the flagstones polished smooth by men's feet and horses' hooves, their original colours red, black, white and blue, with flowering trees on both sides. Tibetans and Yi people still come this way to get to market, and it is also still the best route for horse caravans 'exporting' local produce and 'importing' coal.

*Field strips cosy under plastic sheeting below Nibashan Pass (1) and the famous traffic jam on the Sichuan-Yunnan Highway (2). Coiled flat turban of a Tibetan woman seen at Hanyuan (3). A silver ingot used in ancient times (4, by Tse Shi Fan).*



# Yuexi

Continuing, the Lingguan Route traversed the Qingxi Pass into the area of the Greater Liangshan Mountains. During the Tang dynasty this sector of the Lingguan Route was renamed the Qingxi Route since it was the most dangerous and therefore most crucial part of the whole journey. At that time it was also the border between China and the Nanzhao Kingdom.

This independent kingdom rose from an amalgamation of southwestern tribes, mainly of Tibeto-Burman linguistic background, among them the Yi, Bai and Naxi. The Yi prevailed. Under Emperor Xuanzong (reign dates 712-756) the power of the Nanzhao expanded rapidly and their ruler was given the title King of Yunnan by the Tang emperor. From around 750, the kingdom controlled all the roads and territories of the southwest, switching its allegiance back and forth between Tang China and the Tubo Kingdom of Tibet. In 830 Nanzhao warriors invaded Chengdu and kidnapped tens of thousands of people, including craftsmen. When they repeated this in 870, after a bitter fight they were pushed back across the River Dadu. Internal strife eventually led to the

collapse of the Nanzhao Kingdom in 902 and the establishment of the Dali Kingdom in its stead, the latter lasting until the thirteenth century, when it was conquered by the Mongols.



Today this part of the route is desolate and wild; in fact it is impassable and the Qingxi Pass is no longer of importance. But the road from Hanyuan to Ganluo and the Chengdu-Kunming railway line both run parallel to the old route. We bypassed it in this manner to Haitang, then continued south to the county seat of Yuexi.

Yet another staging post, this town was called Lanxian at the time of the Han dynasty. According to historical records, a special type of horse was domesticated in the southwest of China by the late Spring

and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.). Very short, with a long mane, they were agile and able to carry heavy loads along the mountain paths. Drovers on the Southwestern Silk Road habitually used such miniature horses as their beasts of burden. But they disappeared from their southwestern habitat around the end of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368).

Today, a specialist research and breeding facility has been set up not far from the county seat at Tianwanggeng in an attempt to re-establish the hard-working miniature horse. Those on this farm all stand around one metre tall and weigh about 120 kilos as adults. Occasionally, we passed some of them working along the road.

South of Yuexi, in the ancient town of Zhongsuo, there is a cliff beside the road carved in bas-relief with two vigorous-looking characters reading 'Lingguan', each character seventy centimetres high and seventy across. This inscription served as a landmark, a beacon, for those travelling along the road, as well as wishing them a good journey. Such old customs are still preserved in these remote mountain areas. In many places along the road we also saw auspicious red paper hung up and incense burning, obviously in hopes of a safe passage.





# Xide



The road snaked over the Lesser Xiangling Range, which extends across the counties of Yuexi, Xide and Xichang. As we were traversing Xide County, without warning the road dived into a narrow ravine lined with small-leaved poplars and, all of a sudden, there appeared an ancient castle — Dengxiangying Fort.

During the Ming dynasty, military posts were set up along the border in the southwest and many soldiers and their families settled here as colonists. Most of them stayed close to strategic points to help guard the road and its users. Dengxiangying, deep in the mountains, was highly important because of its geographical location. For two thousand years and more, caravans would stop here to rest. Armed guards were still billeted here up to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Once every few days they would have to escort a group of merchants through the mountains.



Part of the reason for this caution was that the Yi of the region had a fearsome reputation and were known to take Han Chinese captives, putting them to work as their slaves. They themselves remained a slave-owning society until the 1940s (see CHINA TOURISM no. 94 for more on their complex social hierarchy). Nevertheless, some barter trade always went on between the Han Chinese and Yi, giving rise to the saying along the road: 'The Yi cannot be separated from the Han Chinese nor vice

versa; the Yi cannot live without salt nor the Han Chinese without leather goods.'

The fort has now lost its importance; there is no longer any need for travellers to take shelter for the night behind its reassuringly thick battlements. We went in to look around, entering by the southern gateway. There were houses on either side, with firewood neatly piled outside. Several elderly women wearing white turbans were washing rice and preparing a meal. A girl stitching a shoe sole told us that there were twenty-seven families, seven of them Yi, living in the former fort — a total of more than one hundred people.

*To the fields by buffalo (1), while miniature horses can still be seen in action near Yuexi (2). The outer wall of Dengxiangying Fort stands to this day (3); there cock feathers are affixed to a Yi household's front door to ward off evil (4).*



# Xichang



1



2

Xichang is known as Moon City and this is its emblem (1). A Yi girl dances (2); a Lisu girl (4). Sericulture has long been established in Xichang (3). Unfinished Yi woollen charwa capes (5) (2 and 5 by Tse Shi Fan).





The Lingguan Route continued ever south into the Greater Liangshan Mountains. This range is located on the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. It runs from the River Minjiang in the northeast, southwest to the River Jinsha, covering a span of several hundred kilometres.

After passing Lugu, we saw a wide plain in the distance — the site of Xichang, capital of the



4

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the largest area in China in which the Yi live in a compact community. There are around 1.3 million of them here. Known as Qiongzhusi in ancient times, Xichang was a hub of commerce on the Lingguan Route as well as — again — of strategic importance. Because of this, it was involved in many historic confrontations and has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. Today, standing on the slope north of the new town, you can still see the high walls and the impressive gateways of the old city. Three gateways survive: Jianping to the north, Datong to the south and Anding, the east gate. The west gate, Ningyuan, has been demolished, but inside the gateway you can still see the wooden beam once used for the gate.

The following morning, disregarding the mist, we boarded a narrow fishing boat on Lake Qionghai, five kilometres southeast of Xichang, and headed out to a fishing village. The elderly helmsman told me that there are some five thousand villagers, said to be descended from convicts exiled here long ago. However, they themselves claim that their ancestors came from Fujian Province. Interestingly, their dialect lies midway between that of Sichuan and that of Yunnan. In the fishing village, former pack horses have been put to a new occupation serving tourists. Scores of them were promenading with their riders along the lakeside. Lake Qionghai is a popular place to view the full moon every month, as is Xichang in general, owing to the clarity of the skies. This is what gives Xichang its nickname of 'Moon City'.

5



3





## Zhaojue



1

In the Wanchang Valley near Zhaojue in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture there is a group of painted carvings on giant rocks which are locally known as the 'Snake Pit' or 'Art Gallery'. They were executed during the Tang and Song dynasties by people unknown. Some believe the carvers were craftsmen employed by the Nanzhao Kingdom. Others think that they were Buddhist missionaries who had come here to preach their beliefs. Others again argue that they must have been members of a minority people who believed in Buddhism but were influenced by the culture of the Central Plains of China. However, this was a Yi area, and the Yi are not Buddhists, so why should Buddhists from outside come to carve the rocks here?

The carvings are scattered on sixteen rocks and can be divided into three groups: south, west and north. All in all, they cover an area of four hundred square metres. Their execution shows similarities with Tang bas-reliefs and they are rich in content, with religious rituals, people and animals portrayed.

During the rule of King Meng of the Nanzhao Kingdom at the time of the Tang dynasty, the area of the Liangshan Mountains was called Xingjun Prefecture, and its culture was a mixture of that of ethnic groups of Sichuan and Yunnan. But at the same time it had long been exposed to the culture of the Central Plains, so it formed a sort of melting-pot. It may be that these rock carvings are a symbol of the cultural and national exchanges which were taking place all along the Southwestern Silk Road at that time.

*The enigmatic rock carvings at Zhaojue (1) and the old tower in the centre of Huili (2). Modern innovations (3, by Liu Changming) have even made their way into this mountain fastness (4, by Tse Shi Fan). Huili's Catholic church was built in 1929 (6); its priest celebrates Mass (5).*

## Huili



Turning our backs on Xichang, we headed for Huili. The ancient route ran south along the Anning Valley. Passing Dechang and Jinsha — settlements of the Lisu people, who are otherwise concentrated in northwestern Yunnan — the road zigzagged as it continued over the slopes.

Huili was known as Huiwu during the Western Han dynasty. For hundreds of years, merchants travelled through here on the old route and brought it trade and money. But the Huili of today is simple and unsophisticated; hard to believe it has ever been prosperous.

Like most other ancient towns, it was enclosed by walls. The outer walls have been demolished, but part of the inner walls are still standing, with houses clustered in and around them. Strolling through the maze of streets, all lined with shops, you are hard put to it to identify which is the main street.

But of all Huili's surprises, the one I least anticipated was a Catholic church. The Church of Our Lady was built in 1929 and is still in reasonably good condition. The first priest, a French missionary whose Chinese name was Jia Yuanzhen, came to the town early this century. This is said to have been the first Catholic mission in Sichuan. The day we were there happened to be a Sunday and Mass was in progress. The Linguan Route holds many such unexpected sights....

Translated by Wang Mingjie





3



6



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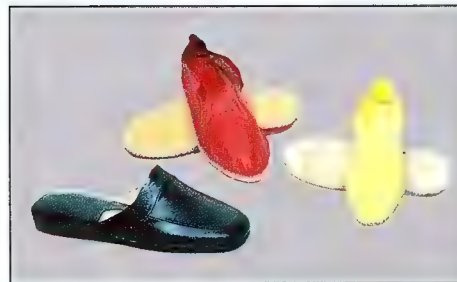
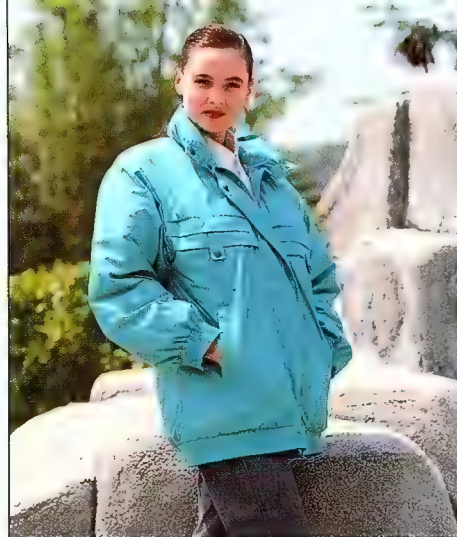




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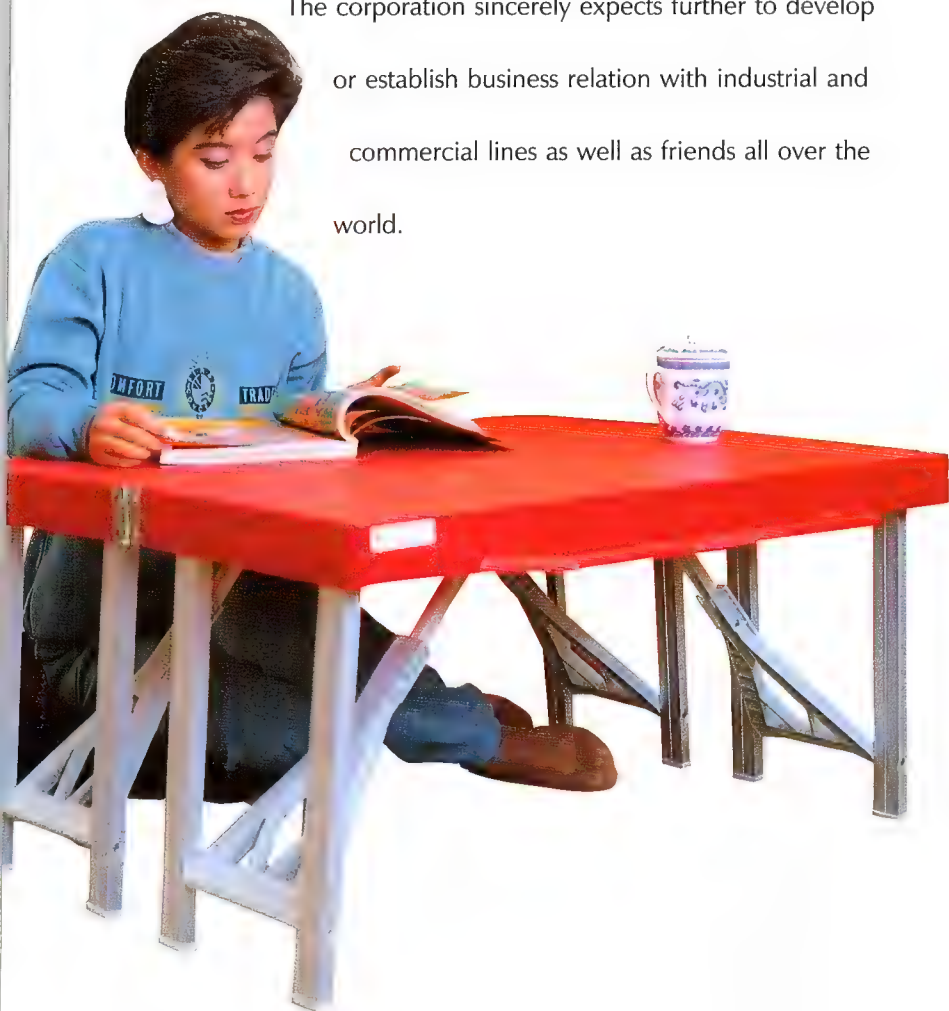




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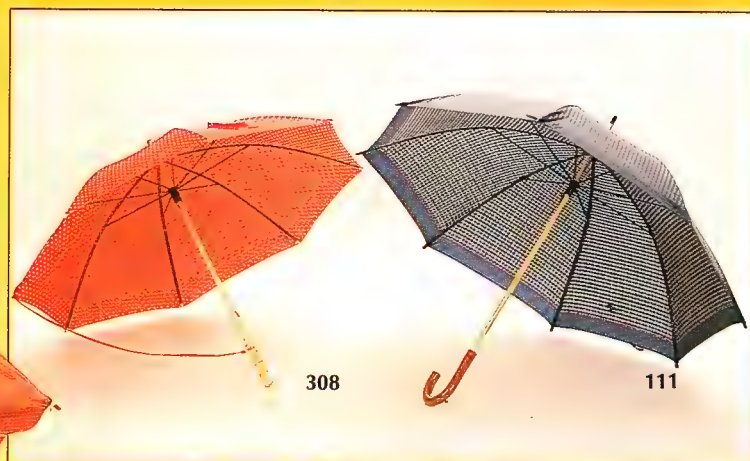
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*The box and the folding table are the same size and form a complete set with the parasol*

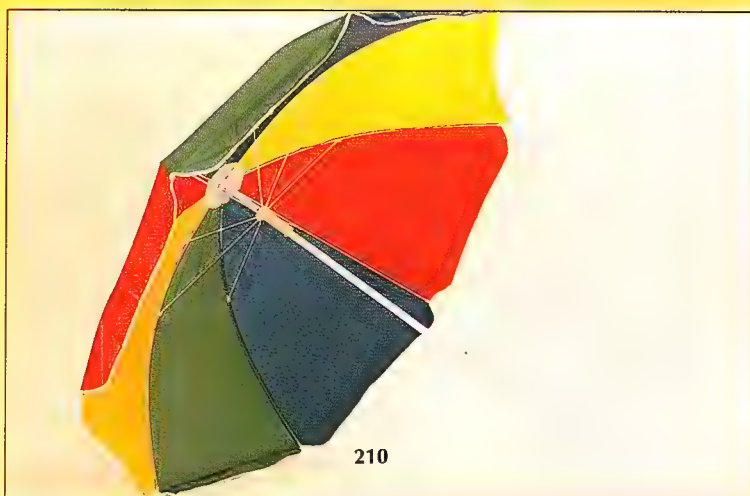


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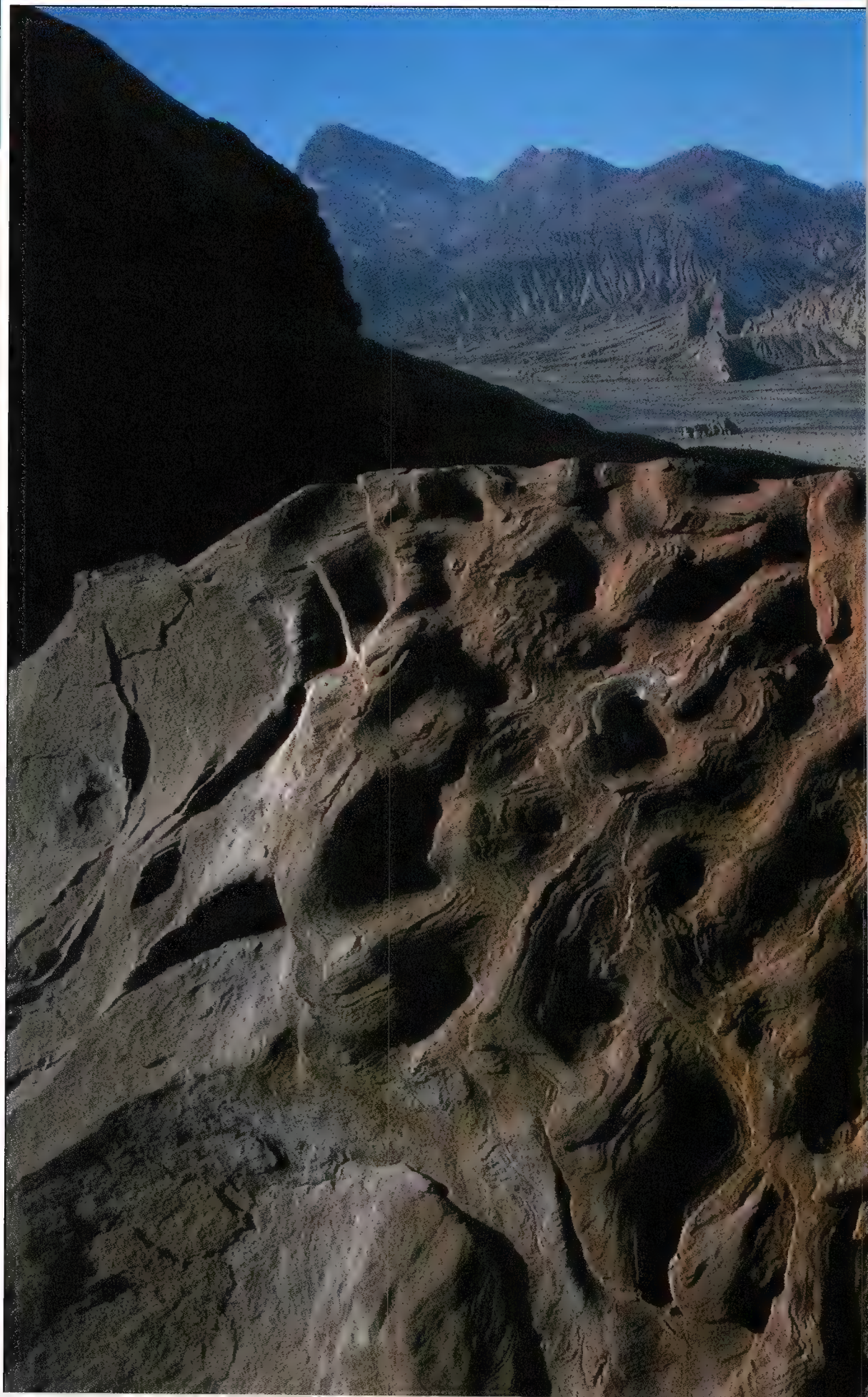


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# Xinjiang: Where Nature



*Eroded sandstone  
overlooking the River  
Yarkant outside  
Shache (Yarkant) in  
western Xinjiang*



# Forces Prevail

PHOTOS BY ZHAO CHENG'AN





**S**et in China's northwest, the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is a land of distinctive physical features marked by three great mountain areas and two huge basins.

Rising in the Pamirs in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush, the Kunlun and Karakoram Ranges stretch across southern Xinjiang. The rugged Karakoram, the second highest range in the world after the Himalaya, averages 6,000 metres above sea-level, while the wider band of the Kunlun sprawls along the Xinjiang-Tibet border into Qinghai and Sichuan for 2,500 kilometres at an average altitude of 5,500 metres. Both ranges, although fairly arid, have some glaciers, but not nearly as many as the Tianshan Mountains.

This latter range more or less bisects the heart of the region, running for about 1,700 kilometres through into the Soviet Union and separating the Tarim Basin in the south from the Junggar Basin in the north. The Tianshan Mountains rise to between 3,000



and 5,500 metres, and are renowned for their extensive glaciation, accounting for sixteen percent of all China's glaciers. There are 6,890 glaciers which cover an area of over 9,500 square kilometres and are concentrated in the higher western end of the chain.

The third mountain area is in the far north, where the Altay Mountains stretch east and west for 1,600 kilometres, forming China's border with the People's Republic of Mongolia and the Soviet Union. At an average of 3,000 metres above sea-level, this range is lower and has a flatter appearance overall than the others, but it benefits from cold, wet currents from the north and consequently boasts dense forests and rich grasslands fed by abundant snow and rain.

The most northerly of the two basins, the Junggar Basin, lies between the Altay Mountains and the Tianshan Mountains with the Gurbantünggüt Desert at its heart. Similarly, in southern Xinjiang, the central area of the extremely arid Tarim Basin is occupied by the notorious Taklimakan Desert.

In fact, Xinjiang contains over fifty-five percent of all of China's deserts, with about 420,000 square kilometres of sandy desert and 293,000 square kilometres of rocky and gravelly desert. Three of China's major deserts are to be found in the region: the Kumtag in the east (the ninth largest at 19,500 square kilometres), the Gurbantünggüt (the second largest at 47,300 square kilometres), and the Taklimakan which, with an area of some 337,000 square kilometres, tops the list. Here, huge sand dunes are formed by the action of winds from the northwest and northeast and are continually pushed southward. It has been calculated that the Taklimakan Desert has spread as much as one hundred kilometres south over the past millennium.

***Crude oil bubbles up from the earth near Karamay in northern Xinjiang (1) while, east of Karamay, salt residue highlights the cracked former bed of the River Manas (2)***







Dry and cold in winter, dry and hot in summer, the region is swept by winds rising to gale force for much of the year. Although there may be snow in the mountains, the rainfall is generally meagre; this is the driest part of China.

There are some salt lakes, and there are largely seasonal rivers fed by the run-off from the glaciers and mountain snows. They shift their course continually, so that the vegetation along an abandoned bed soon dies and the bed itself cracks as new life springs up along the new course.

This is in any case a land of extremes. Further east, in the Turpan Basin, lies Lake Aydingkol, now mostly dried up — the second lowest place in the world at 154 metres below sea-level.

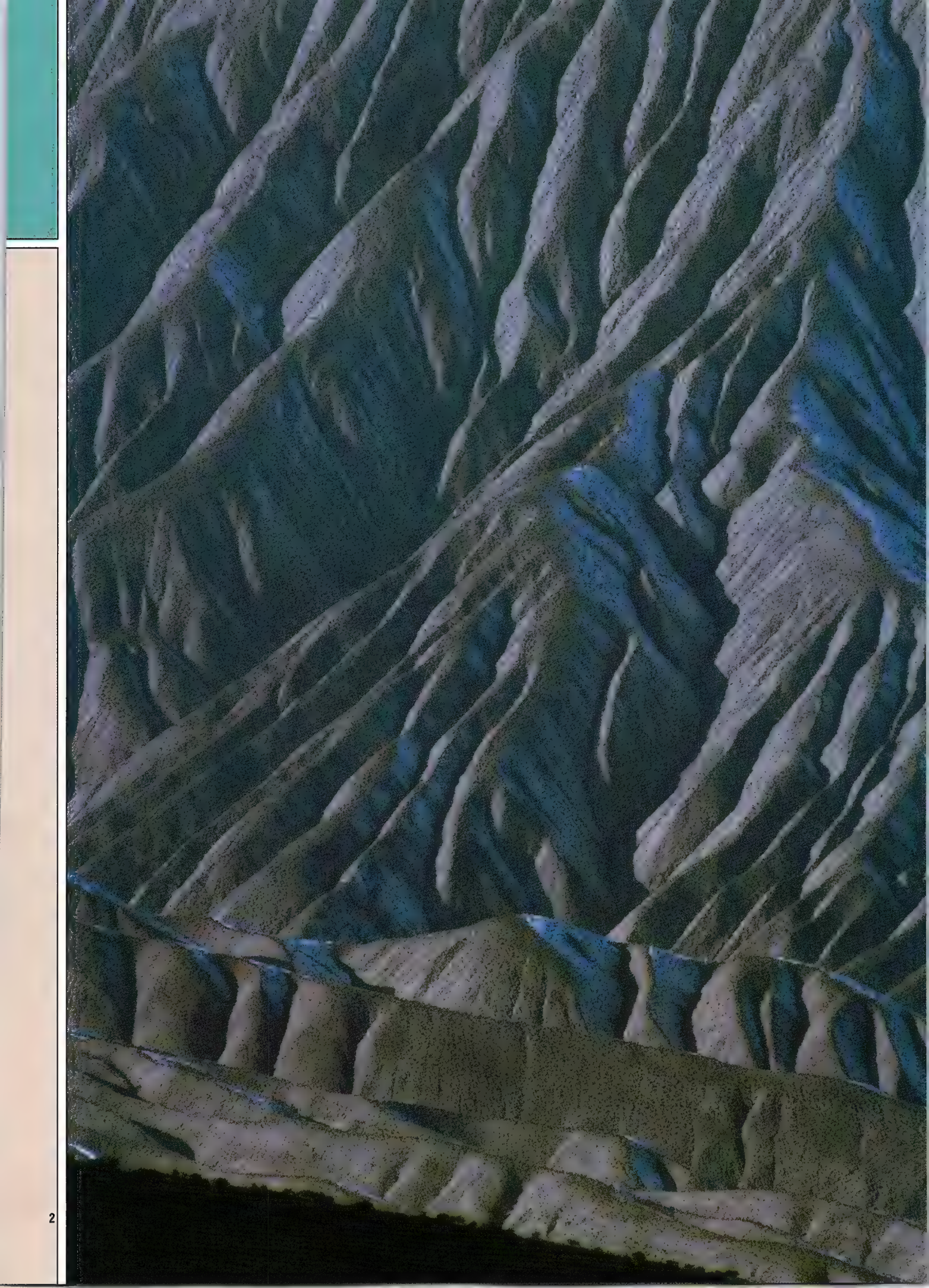


As the sands shift, producing violent sandstorms which themselves cause further erosion, as the rocks are eaten away by time and by weathering, as water sources dry up or alter course, so the ever-changing landscape — subject to extreme variations in temperature — reveals strange, denuded formations. Apart from the welcome of the scattered oases, Xinjiang seems a somehow unearthly place, a place largely hostile to mankind.

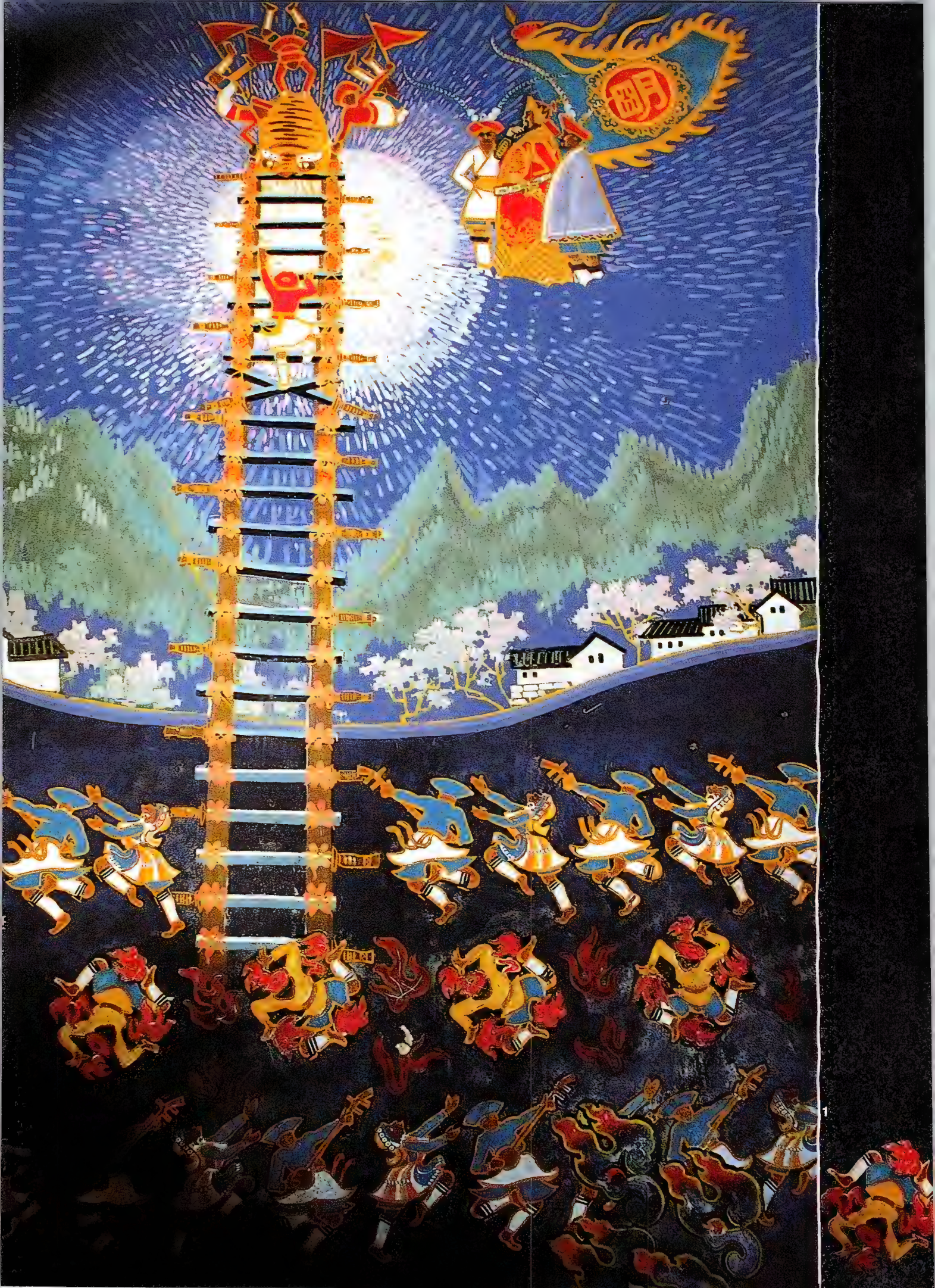
J.M.

***Wind-eroded rock formation (1) near Toli, west of Karamay, and water-eroded hillside near Shache (2)***











# Festival of the Sword Pillar

PHOTOS BY WU JIALIN

TEXT BY WU ZHOU

**D**aogan Jie (Festival of the Sword Pillar) is held on the eighth day of the second lunar month (4th March in 1990), an important annual celebration for the people of the Lisu tribe living in Houqiao Village in Tengchong County on the western border of Yunnan Province.

This festival commemorates a legendary hero who made significant contributions to the tribe's welfare. Centuries ago, the ancestors of the Lisu tribe relied mainly on hunting for a living, but their tranquil lifestyle was eventually threatened by invaders who slaughtered many of the tribesmen. The government sent a minister named Wang, responsible for military affairs, to put an end to the bloodshed. Not only did Wang help the tribesmen fight off their enemies, he also instructed them in martial arts, enabling them to defend themselves against future attacks.

One day Wang was teaching young

tribesmen the art of fencing in a pine forest clearing. When they paused to rest, some of the young men flung their swords into the pine trunks and this chance act soon generated a full-scale competition as the men vied with one another to see whose sword could reach the highest point on a tree trunk. Soon they were clambering up the trunks in their efforts to outdo each other. Wang later incorporated this game into the tribesmen's martial training programme, thinking that it would not only increase their bravery and

*A special ceremony to ward off evil spirits is held (2) before the young tribesmen venture into 'the sea of fire' where they 'dance' barefoot on the red-hot embers (4). After their performance they proudly show that their hands and feet are unharmed (3). A stylised painting of the 'mountain of swords' with flags placed at the top to dispel evil (1, by Tse Shi Fan).*



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daring but would also assist them in tracking down enemies from lookout posts.

However, Wang was accused by an enemy in the government of trying to form his own private army and conspiring to overthrow the emperor. The latter ordered Wang to return to the capital where he was executed on the eighth day of the first lunar month. Deeply mourning their friend and benefactor, the Lisu tribesmen decided to commemorate the date of his death by a tribal festival.

On the eve of the festival, the tribesmen would gather on a mountain slope to build a huge bonfire. Several of the younger men would leap barefoot on the red-hot twigs and embers and 'dance' to the beat of drums and gongs resounding through the night sky. Some even lay down and rolled in the embers while others grabbed handfuls of them and rubbed them into their chests and foreheads.

This awesome spectacle would continue for about fifteen minutes, after which the 'fire dancers' sat in a row holding their hands and feet up for inspection by the older tribesmen. Only those who had not suffered burns were allowed to take part in the ritual of 'climbing the mountain of swords' the following day.

when the whole tribe would once more gather on the mountain slope.

Using rattan strips, the participants would lash thirty-six swords between two pine poles each about twenty metres long, the sharp edges of the blades pointing upwards. With small flags tied all the way along the poles, this 'ladder' of swords was then erected on the ground and one after the other, the participants climbed it with bare hands and feet, performing all manner of stunts upon reaching the top. They were also required to pull out five small flags stuck on top of each pole, tossing them in five different directions to dispel evil spirits. The last to descend the ladder had to untie the swords as he went, flinging them into the ground. These stunning feats of walking on red-hot embers and climbing a ladder of swords were a concrete embodiment of the Chinese adage 'braving the mountain of swords and the sea of fire', symbolizing courage and chivalry.

Today, this dangerous ritual lives on as part of a sport in which the Lisu tribesmen demonstrate their formidable and daring skills.

Translated by Ursula Yeung

Many willing hands prepare the sword ladder (1) which is then raised to an upright position (2). The young men ascend the 'rungs' as naturally as though walking on level ground (4). A Lisu girl in colourful costume (3).



4







# Dragon Boat Racing with a Difference

PHOTOS & TEXT BY TAI CHI YIN



**D**ragon boat races are a common sight in areas to the south of Changjiang (Yangtse) River during the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (around June). Last year however, on the day before the festival (8th June 1989), I was in Henan Province, and setting out from Zhengzhou, the provincial capital, I made my way to Zhoukou City in the southeast to observe the only dragon boat contest held in the regions north of Changjiang.

Zhoukou is situated in the heart of the Yudong Flatland, at the confluence of the Shahe, Yinghe and Jialu Rivers. One of the four famous cities of Henan Province, it has been the hub of communications between north and south since ancient times.

Why should a northern region like Zhoukou have a dragon boat contest at all? Tradition has it that during the reign of Qing Emperor Guangxu (reign dates 1875-1908), a court official Li Zhuonian retired to his home in Zhoukou and one of his followers transported a dragon boat to him as a birthday gift from Hangzhou, Zhejiang. He brought paddlers with him to demonstrate the use of the boat, causing a sensation in Zhoukou. The Hangzhou people then taught the skill to the local populace, thus establishing an essentially southern custom in the north.

But the people of Zhoukou have added an unorthodox note of their own to the proceedings, releasing ducks for the boats to pursue, with the team catching the greatest number being declared the winner.

Accordingly, I left my guesthouse the following morning and headed for the Yinghe River where the contest was to be held. Both banks were crowded with spectators and eventually I managed to hire a wooden boat which was rowed to the riverside in the hope of securing a better vantage point. Suddenly the sound of beating drums and exploding firecrackers from a control boat and ten spectator boats proclaimed that the contest was about to begin. These beautifully decorated boats, containing the supporters of each dragon boat team, vied with one another to catch the attention of the crowds on shore.

By this time numerous dragon boats had appeared on the scene and to my surprise they were only about one-third of the size of those used in the south, being able to manoeuvre and change direction more easily. Shaped like willow leaves, these colourful boats were planted with banners and a large realistic dragon's head and tail adorned either




nd of each boat. The crew numbered  
irteen, comprising ten paddlers, a  
ummer, helmsman and, most important  
f all, the duck-catcher.

First came a 'warm-up' session, as the  
boats raced to be first to reach the control  
boat. Although no match for the big  
outhern boats in terms of speed, the crew  
id not spare themselves as their paddles  
ew in and out of the water in time to the  
hythmic beating of the drums.

Before the contest proper began, the  
eams dismantled the dragon heads and  
ails to prevent damage in the event of an  
ill-too-likely collision. The spectator  
boats then produced several baskets of ducks and in one boat a string of firecrackers was lit while  
imultaneously three fat ducks were thrown into the water. Thereupon the twelve 'headless' dragon  
boats leapt forward under the command of their duck-catchers and on this normally peaceful Yinghe  
River the air erupted with the din of drums beating, firecrackers exploding, ducks honking, boats  
olliding and paddlers and spectators alike roaring and screaming. The duck-catchers tried to hook the  
ucks' necks with poles to prevent them escaping, but the terrified birds would suddenly change  
irection and plunge for the shore. Caught unawares, the two closest boats attempted to turn sharply  
o, but lost their balance and capsized. It was hard not to be amused at the spectacle of the angry  
paddlers shouting and waving their fists at the ducks fortunate enough to have succeeded in their bid  
or freedom.

More and more ducks were thrown into the water and the dragon boats redoubled their efforts to  
atch them. As time went on, the birds became increasingly wily and, as well as swerving abruptly,  
ould suddenly dive into the water to evade their pursuers, if only temporarily.

This animated scene on the Yinghe River continued well into the afternoon, by which time most of  
he ducks had been caught, all the paddlers were exhausted and all the spectators hoarse from  
shouting encouragement. A wonderful day's entertainment — for everyone but the unfortunate victims,  
hat is !  Translated by W. Lau



3

***The only dragon boat contest in the  
north begins (1) and, after much  
fanfare, baskets of ducks will be  
released from this ornately-  
decorated boat (2). Fearful of losing  
the battle (3), the duck-catchers  
redouble their efforts (4).***



4



# The Sixteen Arhats of Zijin Temple







2



3

PHOTOS BY FENG YUNQING TEXT BY RU SHUI

**Z**ijin Temple is located at Ximaowu on Mount Dongshan, itself situated on a peninsula jutting out into Lake Taihu, not far from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province's City of Water. Originally constructed in the early years of the Tang dynasty (618–107), it was restored in the early Ming and extended during the Qing dynasty.

The temple is famous for its sixteen sculptures of arhats (or *luohan*). In contrast to those generally seen in the Buddhist temples of Hangzhou, Suzhou and northern Zhejiang, which are huge and stalwart, the arhats at Zijin are life-sized with subtle facial expressions. They date from the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), a time when the Buddhist religion turned towards the people and new iconographic themes developed. The new style was more fluid, demonstrated particularly in the draperies and poses used, so that the sculptures no longer appeared solemn and unapproachable.

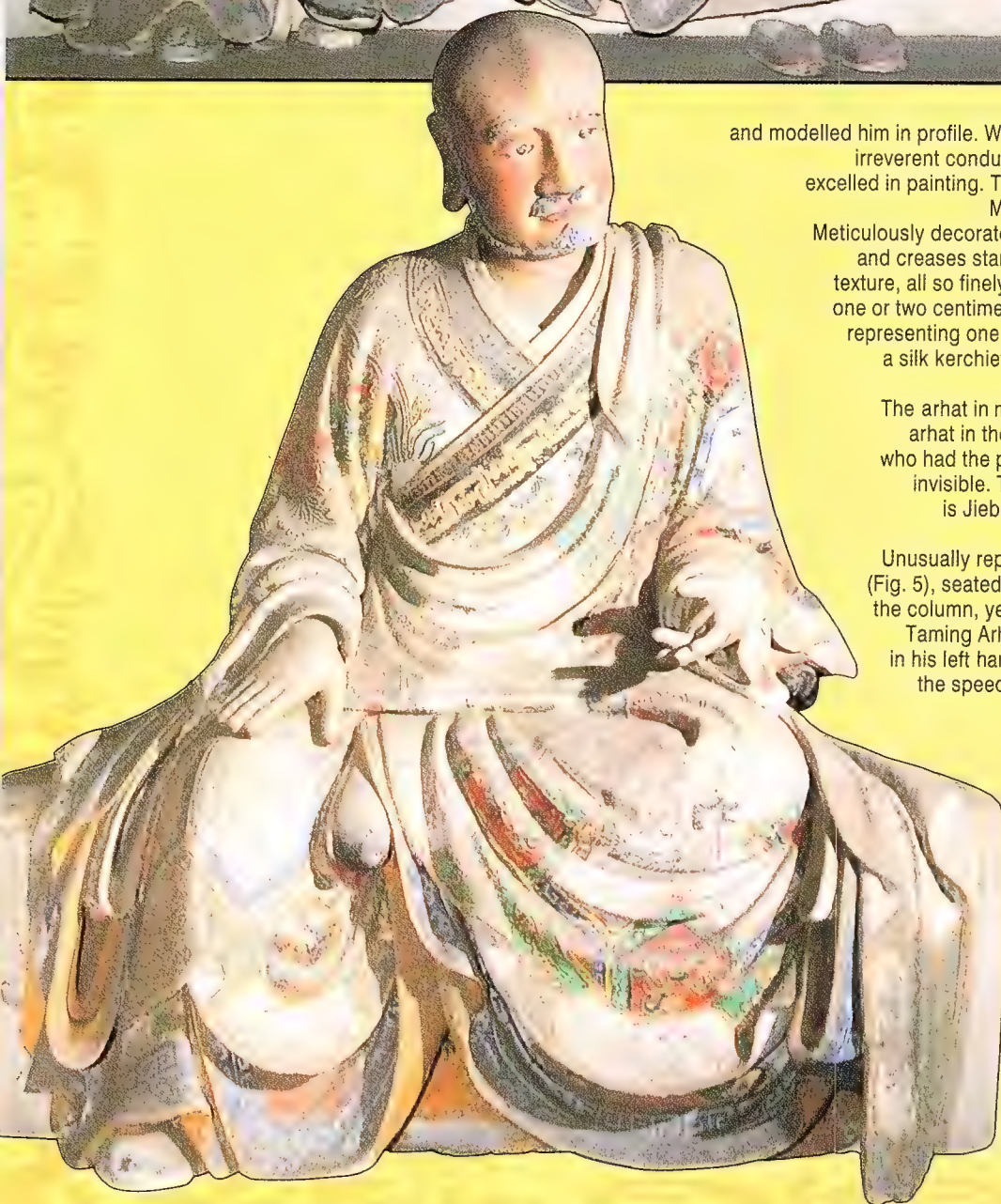
The arhat theme is very popular in Buddhism. The personal disciples of Buddha, the arhats are the guardians of his doctrine and in the Buddhism of Theravada they are the saints travelling the Eightfold Path in search of enlightenment and salvation. In Chinese tradition the arhats vary in number from eighteen to five hundred. They are often endowed with magic powers and each has a personal history and easily recognizable attributes.

Artistically executed and imbued with every human emotion, the arhats of Zijin Temple are reputedly the work of the famous folk sculptor Lei Chao and his wife, of the Southern Song dynasty. Local legend has it that as a renowned Hangzhou sculptor, Lei Chao was commissioned by the local government to make a statue of the emperor. Needing a model, Lei Chao took advantage of a tour of inspection by the emperor to steal a furtive glance at him (it was prohibited to look at the emperor)



4





and modelled him in profile. When the furious authorities came to arrest him for his irreverent conduct, he fled to Suzhou, there marrying a local girl who excelled in painting. They lived and worked in seclusion in Zijin Temple on


Mount Dongshan, leaving behind an enduring legacy. Meticulously decorated, the sculptures wear Han-style robes whose folds and creases stand out clearly and naturally, giving a strong sense of texture, all so finely moulded that these garments made of painted clay one or two centimetres thick appear as light as silk. One of the statues representing one of the twenty devas (Fig. 2) holds a sutra covering – a silk kerchief – whose folds look as though they are being gently stirred by the wind.

The arhat in meditation (Fig. 4) is Banduoji (Panthaka), the tenth arhat in the Trayastrimsat, one of Buddha's greatest disciples, who had the power to produce fire and water and to make himself invisible. The arhat seated with his hands on his knees (Fig. 1) is Jieboji (Gobaka the protector), looking sideways with a somewhat dubious and critical air.

Unusually represented is a group of three arhats taming a dragon (Fig. 5), seated side by side, all gazing at the dragon coiled around the column, yet with very different facial expressions. The Dragon-Taming Arhat, Nantimituoluo (Nandimitra), holds an alms bowl in his left hand while clicking the fingers of his right to symbolize the speed with which he has attained spiritual enlightenment.

The second arhat in the group shows respect and admiration, while the third appears nonchalant, his eyes half-closed.

Then there is Boluotuoshe (Fig. 7), wreathed in smiles, who has tamed the tiger and hence the forces of evil. The tiger prostrated at his feet looks as meek as any cat ready to obey the orders of its master. In contrast, Vajraputra the eighth arhat (Fig. 6), with his reserved expression and knitted eyebrows, appears uncertain and perplexed.

Besides the arhats, the temple contains a statue of Avalokitesvara (Fig. 3), serene and dignified, floating gracefully through the clouds, a canopy carved with red peonies over her head. 







# Han Tomb Models: Windows on the Past

PHOTOS BY ZHENG YUNFENG TEXT BY QIU YONGSHENG

**X**uzhou (ancient Pengcheng) in northwestern Jiangsu Province was the capital city of the State of Chu at the time of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220). In the past few years, around one hundred Han-dynasty tombs have been excavated there, most of them from the Eastern Han (25–220). Tombs of nobles located in the Hanshan and Lali Mountains in Xuzhou's western suburbs have yielded many figurines and models made of earthenware, such as armed warriors and horses (see CHINA TOURISM no. 89).

But the tombs also contained earthenware models of ceremonial and domestic architecture which have proved of enormous significance for our



understanding of life in Han times. These were a new development over the course of the dynasty and reflect the realities of their time.

Part of the reason for such mundane representations appearing as funerary objects was that the burial of precious materials such as gold, bronze, silver and jade fell out of favour; earthenware models took their place. Apart from human and animal images, pavilions, temples, great halls, houses, watch-towers, boats, pigsties, poultry pens, etc., have been found. Some models are glazed, others unglazed. Some are intricate, others simple.



The picture on the left is a model of a well, thirty centimetres high and with a base twenty-six centimetres in diameter. To judge by the imposing dimensions of the model, the occupant of the tomb must have been from a highly placed and prosperous family. The revolving piece on top, the pulley for the rope, still moves freely today. The well-head is topped by a pair of dragon heads, glaring challengingly at one another, reminding us of the traditional association of the dragon with water.



On the far left is a pigsty, its walls neatly capped with tiled eaves, which houses a sturdy porker. In an ingenious combination which can still be seen in rural parts of China today, a toilet is built up over one corner of the pigsty. It is reached by a short flight of steps. This arrangement is intended for the easy and simultaneous collection of human 'night soil' and pig manure.

Watch-towers were frequent sights in ancient times. This model is sixty centimetres tall and has a hipped roof. Its two storeys are clearly demarcated by the eaves half-way up, and it appears to widen from top to bottom, increasing the impression of solidity. The lower floor is surrounded by a courtyard for extra protection. The defensive atmosphere is heightened by the fact that the large window on the upper storey is closed, presenting a blank face to the outside world. However, in times of peace, such windows were generally opened and towers used as viewing points and places to entertain guests.



The earthenware granary model is twenty-one centimetres high. The rounded body is perfectly plain and the bottom rim, wide and thick, seems to balance the conical top, which rather reminds one of a bamboo hat. The top is carefully finished with parallel rows of roof-tiles capped at the junction of the ridges. Real granaries were essential to preserve grain, shielding it from the rain and preventing mould and mildew.



This impressive temple is forty-two centimetres high. It has double eaves and a hipped roof. Its entrance is open, and the balustrades to either side and on the upper storey would have been of wood in the original temple, as would the pillars. The squat, round-topped post in the centre of the entrance, called *nie*, served as a mark of status, commoners entering on one side, nobles on the other. The temple's overall elegance is underlined by the seal-shaped double-circle motifs, typical of Han-dynasty style, which would have been carved in the wood.



The fascinating kitchen range is baked from red clay and has a lustrous green glaze. It is a solid construction twenty-nine centimetres long and twenty-four centimetres high. In its top, there are two fire-holes with rings to hold cooking vessels; an earthenware container used for steaming food is placed over the larger of the rings. At one end there is a fire-wall with an entrance for the wood which fuels the range; a rectangular chimney flue protrudes from the other end. The pattern on the fire-wall was popular in the Han dynasty and had the meaning 'nobility and auspiciousness'.



This model dwelling originally had three storeys, but the ground floor and associated courtyard were damaged. The style of the doors, with the ring of the door knocker clasped in a ferocious animal's mouth, shows that this was a household of some status. The model is twenty-eight centimetres high and has a particularly wide roof. Contrary to normal rules of architecture, the house walls appear to narrow from top to bottom, and the body of the model is wide in front and narrow at the back, with a trapezoidal cross-section. The perforated partition walls give a sense of airiness. By this time the storeyed building, with one storey standing directly over another, was well evolved, with wooden columns and pillars supporting heavy tiled roofs. **C**

Translated by Tsui Lai Hing



# Bamboo Umbrellas to Bring

PHOTOS BY LI XIAOYU TEXT BY RONG YU

**A**s I walked along the dim, narrow alley in Jian'ou, I realized that all the girls and women coming towards me were carrying a colourful umbrella, although the day was sunny. The bright colours shone out cheerfully in the darkness of the passage.

Apparently, local people always take an umbrella with them when they go out, rain or shine, in this century-old county town in the north of Fujian Province. I was told of one very good reason why they place such great store on umbrellas: these are traditional products of the town.

Bamboo flourishes in northern Fujian and it makes an ideal material for the umbrella frame. In Jian'ou mature bamboo, four or more years old, is used. The bamboo stems are first immersed for some time in a chemical liquid prepared according to a secret formula, then baked dry, after which they are ready for use. When prepared in this way, the bamboo frames are durable,

unlikely to snap or lose shape, and they are proof against rotting and woodworm.

The frame is covered with paper made from the fibre of climbing plants which grow in the area. The texture of the finished paper is as fine as the famous Xuan paper from Anhui used for traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, yet it is much stronger and almost transparent. The paper cover is





# n Any Day

reated with tung oil to waterproof and then painted in bright colours in a variety of designs.

The techniques involved in umbrella-making have been handed down from generation to generation in Jian'ou. Although it seems simple, over seventy processes must be mastered, from shaping the bamboo frame to applying the final artistic design.

Apart from the traditional round-shaped umbrellas, there are hexagonal, octagonal and scalloped 'plum blossom' shapes. There is also a 'double-decker' type. Some of the umbrella varieties seem to have more aesthetic than practical value. For example, there are miniature ones so small that you can hold them in the palm of your hand, of the type that add gaiety to icecream sundaes and long drinks. Other umbrellas have been adapted for use in interior decoration as lampshades and as wall mountings to grace courtyards and verandas.

**E**

ranslated by Gu Weizhou





神農本草  
一木部  
一苦  
茶味甘苦  
微寒無毒  
主  
瘧瘧  
利小  
便  
去熱渴  
熱  
令人少  
睡  
秋採之  
苦  
主下食消  
氣  
一木部



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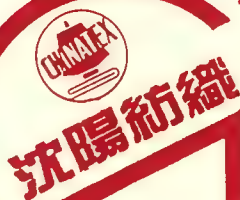
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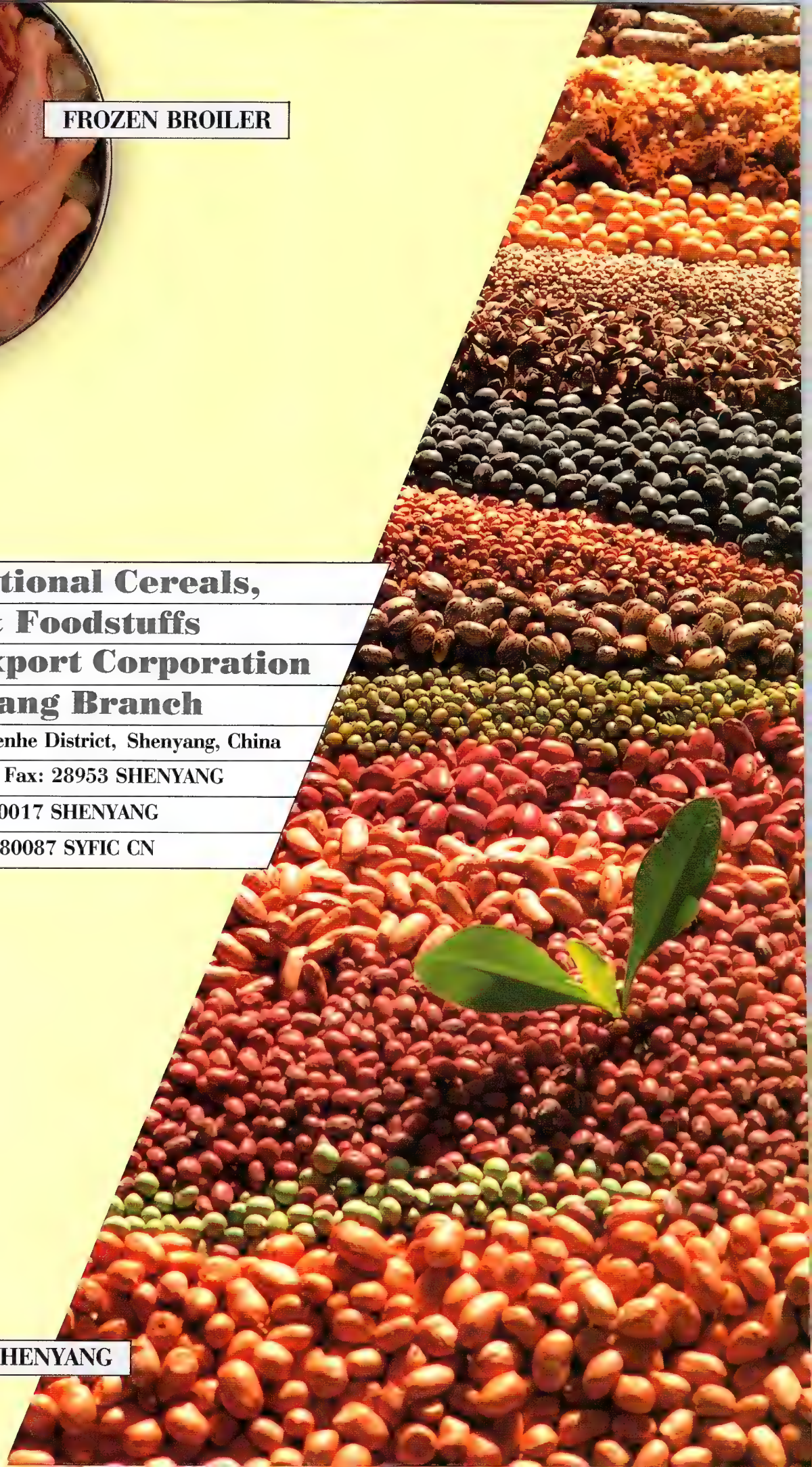
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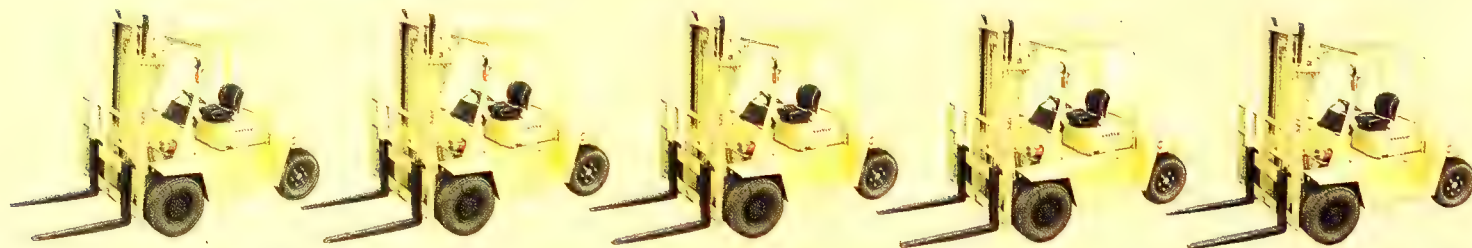
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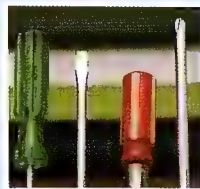
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# Wu-Yue White Wood Carvings

PHOTOS BY CHAN YAT NIN


TEXT BY RONG YU

**T**oday's provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui were once the location of the states of Wu (585-473 B.C.) and Yue (510-306 B.C.). Hence the name given to these wooden carvings, of a type which is said to have been made for more than three hundred years. A reflection of everyday customs and occupations in the past (most of which can still be seen in China today), they are common playthings for children in the areas south of the River Yangtse.

Made from white poplar, ginkgo and *Symplocos paniculate* (a variety of sweet-leaf), the figures or groups of figures — less than ten centimetres high — employ the wood in its natural state except for a few dabs of colour here and there to highlight the details.

Among the figures shown here we can pick out a man with a skull-cap and a cross-over tunic, long-stemmed pipe in hand, apparently an ordinary villager of times gone by — until you notice the snake slung around his neck! This is an itinerant snake-catcher, snake, basket and all.

A more typical sight on the waterways and lakes south of the Yangtse is the boatman operating the oars with his feet. There is also a woman combing cotton and another spinning yarn. Other charming scenes depict people engaged in threshing, milling, weaving, embroidery, selling watermelons, transporting goods by wheelbarrow and fishing with cormorants as well as with nets.

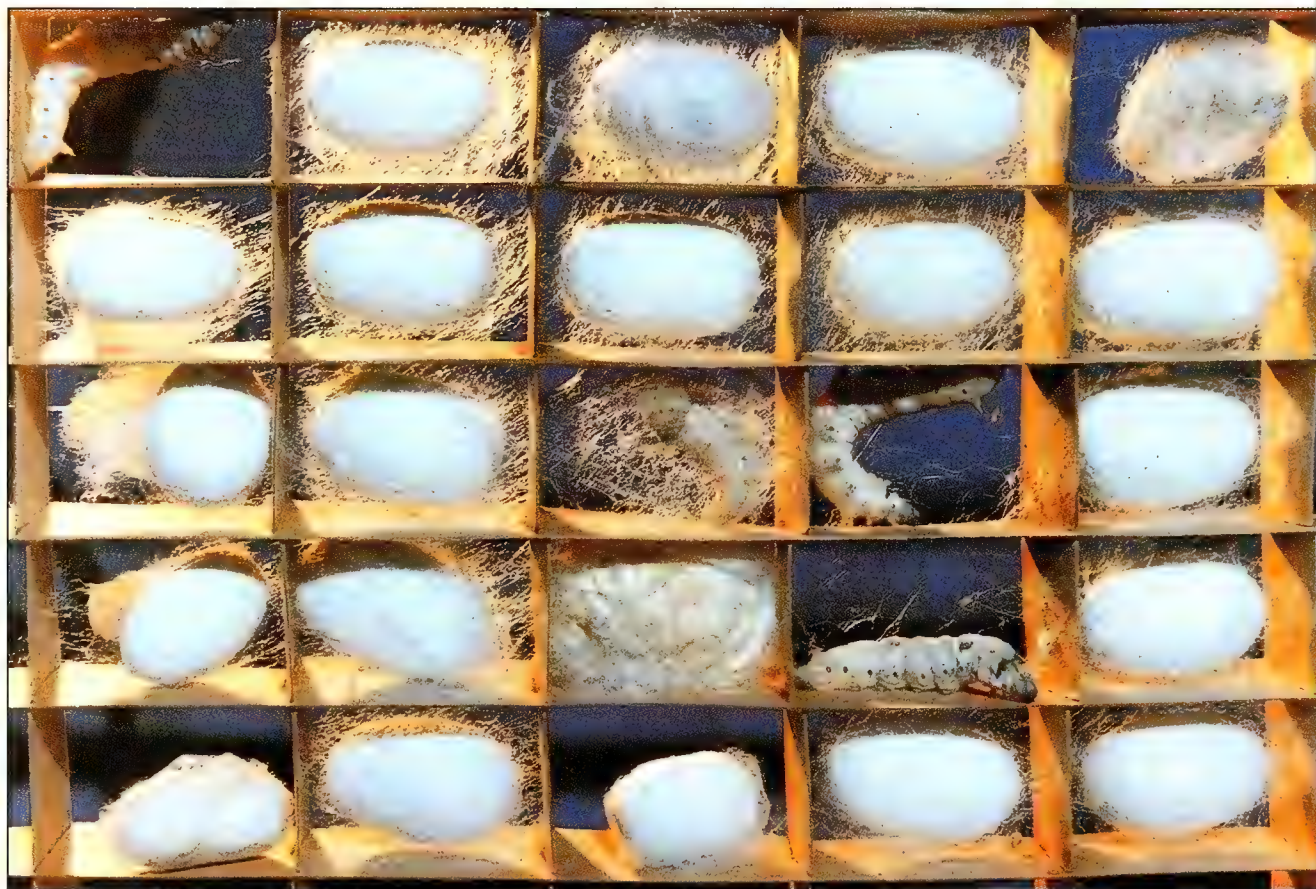
The only trade portrayed here which is definitely an image from the past is the barefoot rickshaw-puller with his effete, spoilt passenger. Even sedan-chair bearers are still sometimes called on to give their services at traditional weddings and at certain popular pilgrimage mountains.  Translated by Chen Jiaji





# The Noble Worm

PHOTOS BY LU BINGRONG



**F**or many centuries, silk and China were practically synonymous as far as the peoples of Europe were concerned. Seres — the kingdom of silk — was first referred to in around the fourth century B.C. by the Greeks and Romans. However, the great trading routes which developed, leading from northwestern China across the deserts and mountains to Persia and on to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, were only dubbed the 'Silk Road' after their most famous commodity in the nineteenth century ... and that by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen.

Behind the supreme elegance of silk, that sensuous and glowing fabric, lies a small creature which even its greatest admirers will have to admit is no beauty — the silkworm. The discovery of the fact that this 'worm' produces a silken fibre is

attributed, in Chinese legend at least, to Lei Zu, until recently revered as the Silkworm Goddess. Lei Zu was the wife of Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor), who is traditionally given the dates 2697–2597 B.C., and who is thought to have been the ruler of tribes living in the valley of the Huanghe (Yellow River).

The story goes that, one day, Lei Zu spotted some caterpillars eating the leaves of a mulberry tree. Passing again a few days later, she noticed that the caterpillars had spun cocoons. Picking one up to look at it more closely, she discovered that it was made up of a web of gossamer-like fibres. Thinking it might be feasible to use these fibres as a weaving material, she set to work to pull them off but, of course, they broke. So she experimented and found that the threads came off easily if she first boiled the cocoons in water. The first steps had been taken!

Silk had in fact been made for many





thousands of years before ever it fascinated, let alone reached, the Romans. Oracle bones of the Shang dynasty (around 16th–11th century B.C.) have been unearthed which were engraved with the characters for 'mulberry', 'silkworm', 'silk' and 'brocade'. At Anyang in Henan Province, Shang-dynasty bronzes have been found together with remnants of silk fabrics, both plain-textured and with a diamond-patterned weave. Written records of various types of silks exist from the era of the Zhou dynasty (1066–56 B.C.). Already, by this period, there were imperial workshops producing silk fabrics under the supervision of a court official. The raising of silkworms became an increasingly important sideline for farming families, mainly the womenfolk.

In the *Book of Songs*, a collection of more than three hundred songs composed before the sixth century B.C., there are sundry references to silk, silkworms and mulberry leaves. In one entitled *The Eastern Hills*, for example, we read:

*Wild silkworms twist and turn  
Long days on the mulberry bush;  
And I curled up to sleep alone  
Beneath my cart.*

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods (722–221 B.C.) the use of silk spread outwards from the imperial court. Silk articles became an important funerary object for the nobility and were also given as gifts to pay homage or show respect. Many merchants became involved in the buying and selling of silk, of which over ten kinds were produced at the time, according to historical records.

The silk industry was in full flow by the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and relics of silk fabrics from that time have been found both in and outside China. In 1972, an archaeological dig at Mawangdui in Changsha, Hunan Province, uncovered a Han-dynasty tomb which contained a large quantity of silks of many different types: thin silks, silk gauze, brocades and damasks. In a variety of colours, these fabrics were embroidered or painted with clouds, animals, flowers and grass, or geometrical motifs.

The Han dynasty was the great era of the Silk Road, and trade continued more or less through until the middle of the Tang dynasty (618–907). The Chinese managed to keep the secret of the origin of their silk until around the year 440 when, again according to legend, a

Chinese princess hid silkworm eggs in her headdress when she went to marry the king of Khotan (now Hotan in southern Xinjiang). Since the Roman and subsequent Byzantine empires were paying out large amounts from their coffers to purchase silk for ceremonial and religious use, they were particularly eager to discover the secret for themselves and, in around 550, two Nestorian monks obtained silkworm eggs (which they hid in their hollow bamboo staves!) and introduced them to Byzantium. By the sixth century the Persians were also proficient at weaving silk. But it was not until the thirteenth or fourteenth century that silk production became widely established in Europe.

Before the Tang, the main production centre was in the north of China, but during that dynasty silk centres became established south of the River Yangtse in Jiangsu, especially around Lake Taihu at Wuxi and Suzhou, and in Zhejiang. These, together with Shandong, are still the main centres of silk production in China today.

So, what of the silkworm itself? This is in fact the caterpillar or larva stage in the life of a moth, the species most commonly used being the *Bombyx mori* since it produces the finest and whitest silk fibres.

Farmers start the process of producing silk with the eggs of the moth. It normally takes three days for the eggs to hatch into black, thread-like grubs. Within a month, eating mulberry leaves voraciously, with intermittent dormant periods and shedding of skin, the grubs multiply their weight 10,000-fold. The cultivation of the mulberry trees or bushes to feed the silkworms is very important; the supply of leaves must be continuous over the crucial period. The silkworms then begin to spin their protective cocoon, a process taking seventy-two hours, all ready to transform themselves into moths.

If the process were allowed to continue naturally, the silkworm moth would break out of its cocoon, breaking

the filaments as it did so. But the Chinese found a way to keep the filaments whole. The cocoons are dropped into boiling water, which softens the gluey protein called sericin that holds the silk fibres together. The strands can then be unwound into continuous filaments over one thousand metres long. Since the silk is thin, strands from several cocoons are unwound at the same time and joined together to make a single, stronger thread.

Visitors to China who are interested in seeing something more of the history and development of this ancient process, as well as its present-day application, will find several special-interest tours on offer. For example, in Jiangsu Province, it is possible to take the 'New Silk Road Trip'. Highlights include a visit to the Brocade Research Institute in Nanjing, the provincial capital, where rare ancient silks are preserved and where it is possible to watch silk being woven on an ancient loom. Another visit is to the Sericulture Research Institute of China's Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Zhenjiang. Also included is a stop in Wuxi on Lake Taihu, where visitors can watch workers picking mulberry leaves to feed silkworms, silkworms making their cocoons, and cocoons being processed to gain the silk thread. Finally, one can watch the silk thread being woven into silk fabric! Lovely Suzhou is also a popular part of this tour, with visits to the Embroidery Research Institute and several silk factories.

J.M.



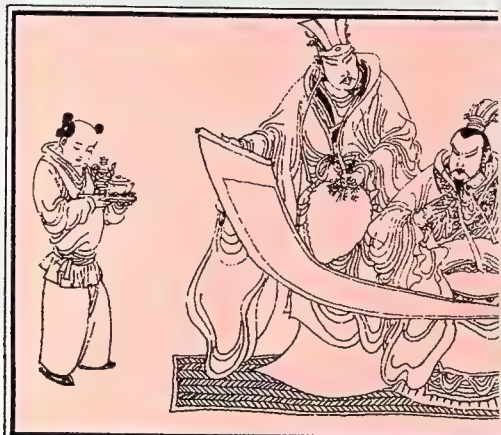
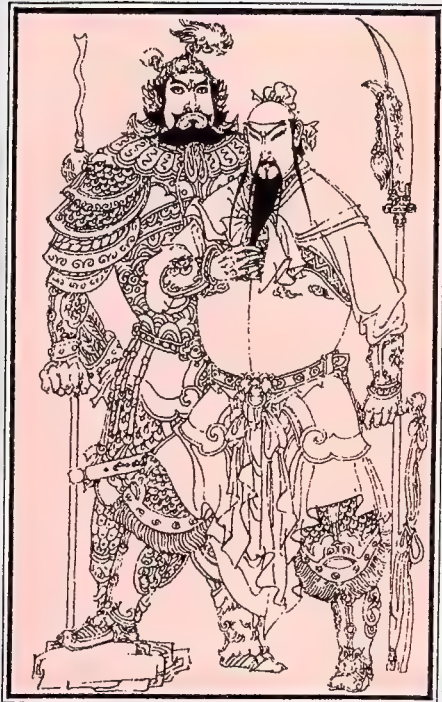


# Stalwarts of Shu

DRAWINGS BY MA FANGLU

**T**he turbulent later period of the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220) was followed by years of further confusion as smaller states and kingdoms vied for supremacy during the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280).

In the year 221 Liu Bei (161-223), a descendant of the Han imperial family, set himself up as the ruler of the Kingdom of Han, with his capital at Chengdu. Posterity normally refers to this kingdom as Shu or Shu Han (Shu being the old name for Sichuan). Its territory included a large part of present-day Sichuan and Yunnan, all of Guizhou, and some parts of



- 1 Towards the end of the Eastern Han dynasty Liu Bei began to gather a private army. Among those who joined him were Zhang Fei (left) and Guan Yu (right), later famous generals. They became his sworn brothers.
- 2 Initially, Liu Bei's army joined the Han government troops in suppressing the Yellow Turban uprising (184-192). However, in 193 Liu Bei suffered a setback and sought refuge with Cao Cao, despite their mutual distrust.
- 3 Having beseeched Cao Cao to let him lead his army into battle in 199,

Liu Bei turned against his protector mid-way.

- 4 Cao Cao promptly sent his own army to engage Liu Bei's men, capturing Guan Yu (seen here in action with a banner in the background reading 'Liu'). Cao Cao also took Liu Bei's two wives captive.
- 5 Sheltering in Jingzhou (a prefecture covering the greater part of today's Hubei and Hunan, and southwestern Henan), Liu Bei realized he needed good advice to help him in his ambitious schemes. He was told to

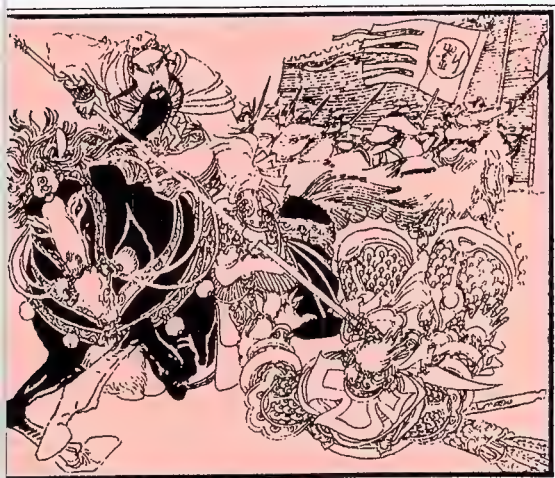


Shaanxi and Gansu. Throughout, the kingdom was in conflict with the contemporary kingdoms of Wu, established by Sun Quan, and Wei, founded by Cao Cao, the wily former prime minister and regent of the Eastern Han. It was Wei which defeated Shu and annexed it in 263.

Many stories have grown up around this chaotic period which afforded plenty of opportunities for the valiant, the heroic and the wise to come to the fore. Some of their exploits were recorded in literature such as *The History of the Three Kingdoms*, a third-century work by Chen Shou, and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a historical novel from the early Ming dynasty written by Luo Guanzhong.

This month's Cartoons illustrates the gradual formation around Liu Bei of a close band of supporters who would provide the nucleus of his drive for power.

Taken from *Stories of Chinese People*, published by Chongqing Publishing House



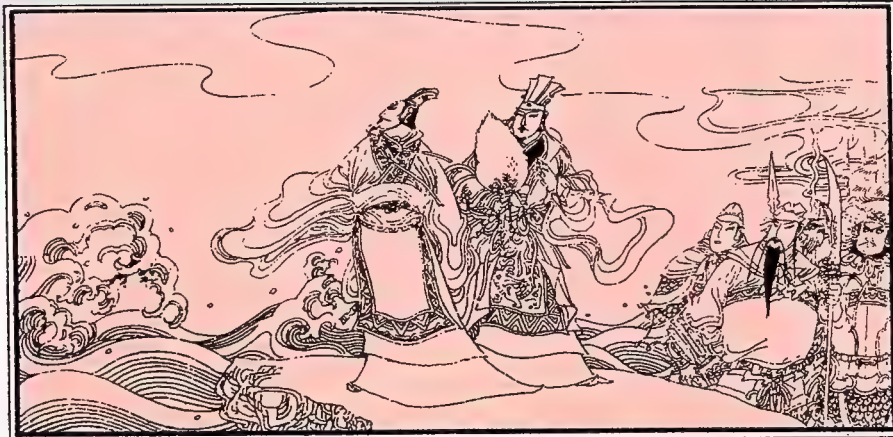
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consult Zhuge Liang (181-234). So, in 207, Liu Bei set off to find the sage in his remote country retreat in Hubei, accompanied by his two sworn brothers. They had to make three trips before Zhuge Liang would consent to receive Liu Bei.

- 6 The two held a long conversation about the affairs of the country. Analysing the general situation, Zhuge Liang told Liu Bei that he should take control of Jingzhou, then seize Yizhou (now in Sichuan). Even before he agreed to help Liu Bei, Zhuge

Liang predicted that the country would be divided into three.

- 7 Assisted by this political and military genius and by the fierce and courageous Guan Yu (deified by later generations) and Zhang Fei, Liu Bei was able to add to his power. He established Shu after the decisive Battle of Chibi in which he and Sun Quan of Wu allied themselves against Cao Cao of Wei. Zhuge Liang served as the prime minister of Shu for long years.

©

Translated by M.K.



**T**he important author Mao Tun (the pen-name of Shen Yanbing) was born in 1896 in Wuzhen, Tongxiang County, Zhejiang Province. In November 1920, together with other writers, he founded the Literary Research Society, and in 1921 became editor of *Fiction*, a literary monthly published in Shanghai. From 1926 to 1927 he edited a daily in Hangzhou, Zhejiang's provincial capital, before returning to Shanghai. From then on he adopted the pseudonym Mao Tun in his work, producing *The Canker*, a trilogy, in 1927, *Rainbow* in 1930, *Three Companions* in 1931, *Midnight* in 1933, and *Corrosion* in 1941, as well as short stories, essays and articles. In 1949, after the founding of the People's Republic, Mao Tun was appointed Minister of Culture, a post he held until 1965. He died in 1981.

The short story presented here and in our next issue is taken from a collection of short stories written between 1927 and 1944. Mao Tun depicts with realism a wide range of Chinese society in the 1930s, showing the rural calamities, economic depression and social upheavals of that time.

In *Spring Silkworms*, we follow the progress of what is the most crucial part of the year for farmers involved in silkworm breeding. Old Tung Pao sees portents everywhere: the fact that the April weather is much hotter than usual, the increase in hated foreign contraptions and goods in the countryside — including foreign strain silkworms! But, on the whole, he believes that the omens for a good crop of silkworms are favourable. The fact is, he needs the money badly to pay off part of his family's mounting debts. We continue....

The weather remained warm. The rays of the sun forced open the tender, finger-like, little buds. They had already grown to the size of a small hand. Around Old Tung Pao's village, the mulberry trees seemed to respond especially well. From a distance they gave the appearance of a low grey picket fence on top of which a long swath of green brocade had been spread. Bit by bit, day by day, hope grew in the hearts of the villagers. The unspoken mobilization order for the silkworm campaign reached everywhere and everyone. Silkworm rearing equipment that had been laid away for a year was again brought out to be scrubbed and mended. Beside the little stream which ran through the village, women and children, with much laughter and calling back and forth, washed the implements.

None of these women or children looked really healthy. Since the coming of spring, they had been eating only half their fill; their clothes were old and torn. As a matter of fact, they weren't much better off than beggars. Yet all were in quite good spirits, sustained by enormous patience and grand illusions. Burdened though they were by daily mounting debts, they had only one thought in their heads — If we get a good crop of silkworms, everything will be all right!... They could already visualize how, in a month, the shiny green leaves would be converted into snow-white cocoons, the

cocoons exchanged for clinking silver dollar. Although their stomachs were growling with hunger, they couldn't refrain from smiling at the happy prospect.

Old Tung Pao's daughter-in-law was among the women by the stream. With the help of her twelve-year-old son, Little Pao, she had already finished washing the family's large trays of woven bamboo strips. Seated on a stone beside the stream, she wiped her perspiring face with the edge of her tunic. A twenty-year-old girl, working with other women on the opposite side of the stream, hailed her:

"Are you raising foreign silkworms this year too?"

It was Sixth Treasure, sister of young Fenching, the neighbour who lived across the stream.

The thick eyebrows of Old Tung Pao's daughter-in-law at once contracted. Her voice sounded as if she had just been waiting for a chance to let off steam.

"Don't ask me; what the old man says goes!" she shouted. "He's dead set against it. I won't let us raise more than one batch of foreign breed! The old fool only has to hear the word 'foreign' to send him up in the air! He takes dollars made of foreign silver, though those are the only 'foreign' things he likes!"

The women on the other side of the stream laughed. From the threshing ground behind them a strapping young man approached. He reached the stream and crossed over on the four logs that served as a bridge. Seeing him, his sister-in-law dropped her tirade and called in a high voice:

"Ah To, will you help me carry these trays. They're as heavy as dead dogs when they're wet!"

Without a word, Ah To lifted the six big trays and set them, dripping, on his head. Balancing them in place, he walked off, swinging his hands in a swimming motion. When in a good mood, Ah To refused nobody. If any of the village women asked him to carry something heavy or fish something out of the stream, he was usually quite willing. But today he probably was a little grumpy, and so he walked empty-handed with only six trays on his head. The sight of him, looking as if he were wearing six layers of wide straw hats, his waist twisting at each step in imitation of the ladies of the town, sent the women into peals of laughter. Lotus, wife of Old Tung Pao's nearest neighbour, called with a giggle:

"Hey, Ah To, come back here. Carry a few trays for me too!"

Ah To grinned. "Not unless you call me a sweet name!" He continued walking. An instant later he had reached the porch of his house and set down the trays out of the sun.

"Will 'kid brother' do?" demanded Lotus, laughing boisterously. She had a remarkably clean white complexion, but her face was very flat. When she laughed, all that could be seen was a big open mouth and two tiny slits of eyes. Originally a slavey in a house in town, she had been married off to Old Tung Pao's neighbour — a prematurely aged man who walked around with a sour expression and never said a word all day. That was less than

# Spring Silkworms (I)





knew why Sixth Treasure and Lotus were quarrelling. It did his heart good to hear that sharp-tongued Sixth Treasure get told off in public.

Old Tung Pao came out of the house with a wooden tray-stand on his shoulder. Some of the legs of the uprights had been eaten by termites, and he wanted to repair them. At the sight of Ah To standing there laughing at the women, Old Tung Pao's face lengthened. The boy hadn't much sense of propriety, he well knew. What disturbed him particularly was the way Ah To and Lotus were always talking and laughing together. "That bitch is an evil spirit. Fooling with her will bring ruin on our house," he had often warned his younger son.

"Ah To!" he now barked angrily. "Enjoying the scenery? Your brother's in the back mending equipment. Go and give him a hand!" His inflamed eyes bored into Ah To, never leaving the boy until he disappeared into the house.

Only then did Old Tung Pao start work on the tray-stand. After examining it carefully, he slowly began his repairs. Years ago, Old Tung Pao had worked for a time as a carpenter. But he was old now; his fingers had lost their strength. A few minutes' work and he was breathing hard. He raised his head and looked into the house. Five squares of cloth to which sticky silkworm eggs were adhered, hung from a horizontal bamboo pole.

His daughter-in-law, Ah Sze's wife, was at the other end of the porch, pasting paper on big trays of woven bamboo strips. Last year, to economize a bit, they had bought and used old newspaper. Old Tung Pao still maintained that was why the eggs had hatched poorly — it was unlucky to use paper with writing on it for such a prosaic purpose. Writing meant scholarship, and scholarship had to be respected. This year the whole family had skipped a meal and with the money saved, purchased special "tray pasting paper." Ah Sze's wife pasted the tough, gosling-yellow sheets smooth and flat; on every tray she also affixed three little coloured paper pictures, bought at the same time. One was the "Platter of Plenty"; the other two showed a militant figure on horseback, pennant in hand. He, according to local belief, was the "Guardian of Silkworm Hatching."

"I was only able to buy twenty loads of mulberry leaves with that thirty silver dollars I borrowed on your father's guarantee," Old Tung Pao said to his daughter-in-law. He was still panting from his exertions with the tray-stand. "Our rice will be finished by the day after tomorrow. What are we going to do?"

Thanks to her father's influence with his boss and his willingness to guarantee repayment of the loan, Old Tung Pao was able to borrow the money at a low rate of interest — only twenty-five per cent a month! Both the principal and interest had to be repaid by the end of the silkworm season.

Ah Sze's wife finished pasting a tray and placed it in the sun. "You've spent it all on leaves," she said angrily. "We'll have a lot of leaves left over, just like last year!"

"Full of lucky words, aren't you?" demanded the old man, sarcastically. "I sup-

pose every year'll be like last year? We can't get more than a dozen or so loads of leaves from our own trees. With five sets of grubs to feed, that won't be nearly enough."

"Oh, of course, you're never wrong!" she replied hotly. "All I know is with rice we can eat, without it we'll go hungry!" His stubborn refusal to raise any foreign silkworms last year had left them with only the unsalable local breed. As a result, she was often contrary with him.

The old man's face turned purple with rage. After this, neither would speak to the other.

But hatching time was drawing closer every day. The little village's two dozen families were thrown into a state of great tension, great determination, great struggle. With it all, they were possessed of a great hope, a hope that could almost make them forget their hungry bellies.

Old Tung Pao's family, borrowing a little here, getting a little credit there, somehow managed to get by. Nor did the other families eat any better; there wasn't one with a spare bag of rice! Although they had harvested a good crop the previous year, landlords, creditors, taxes, levies, one after another, had cleaned the peasants out long ago. Now all their hopes were pinned on the spring silkworms. The repayment date of every loan they made was set for the "end of the silkworm season."

With high hopes and considerable fear, like soldiers going into a hand-to-hand battle to the death, they prepared for their spring silkworm campaign!

"Grain Rain" day — bringing gentle drizzles — was not far off. Almost imperceptibly, the silkworm eggs of the two dozen village families began to show faint tinges of green. Women, when they met on the public threshing ground, would speak to one another agitatedly in tones that were anxious yet joyful.

"Over at Sixth Treasure's place, they're almost ready to incubate their eggs!"

"Lotus says her family is going to start incubating tomorrow. So soon!"

"Huang 'the Priest' has made a divination. He predicts that this spring mulberry leaves will go to four dollars a load!"

Old Tung Pao's daughter-in-law examined their five sets of eggs. They looked bad. The tiny seed-like eggs were still pitch black, without even a hint of green. Her husband, Ah Sze, took them into the light to peer at them carefully. Even so, he could find hardly any ripening eggs. She was very worried.

"You incubate them anyhow. Maybe this variety is a little slow," her husband forced himself to say consolingly.

Her lips pressed tight, she made no reply.

Old Tung Pao's wrinkled face sagged with dejection. Though he said nothing, he thought their prospects were dim.

The next day, Ah Sze's wife again examined the eggs. Ha! Quite a few were turning green, and a very shiny green at that! Immediately, she told her husband, told Old Tung Pao, Ah To ... she even told her son Little Pao. Now the incubating process could begin! She held the five pieces of cloth to which the eggs were adhered against her bare bosom. As if cuddling

six months ago, but her love affairs and escapades already were the talk of the village.

"Shameless hussy!" came a contemptuous female voice from across the stream.

Lotus' piggy eyes immediately widened. "Who said that?" she demanded angrily. "If you've got the brass to call me names, let's see you try it to my face! Come out into the open!"

"Think you can handle me? I'm talking about a shameless, man-crazy baggage! If the shoe fits, wear it!" retorted Sixth Treasure, for it was she who had spoken. She too was famous in the village, but as a mischievous, lively young woman.

The two began splashing water at each other from opposite banks of the stream. Girls who enjoyed a row took sides and joined the battle, while the children whooped with laughter. Old Tung Pao's daughter-in-law was more decorous. She picked up her remaining trays, called to Little Pao and returned home. Ah To watched from the porch, grinning. He





Last year's divination had proved all too accurate. He didn't dare to think about that now.

Every family in the village was busy "incubating." For the time being there were few women's footprints on the threshing ground or the banks of the little stream. An unofficial "martial law" had been imposed. Even peasants normally on very good terms stopped visiting one another. For a guest to come and frighten away the spirits of the ripening eggs — that would be no laughing matter! At most, people exchanged a few words in low tones when they met, then quickly separated. This was the "sacred" season!

Old Tung Pao's family was on pins and needles. In the five sets of eggs a few grubs had begun wriggling. It was exactly one day before Grain Rain. Ah Sze's wife had calculated that most of the eggs wouldn't hatch until after that day. Before or after Grain Rain was all right, but for eggs to hatch on the day itself was considered highly unlucky. Incubation was no longer necessary, and the eggs were carefully placed in the 'special' shed. Old Tung Pao stole a glance at his garlic at the foot of the wall. His heart dropped. There were still only the same two small green shoots the garlic had originally! He didn't dare to look any closer. He prayed silently that by noon the day after tomorrow the garlic would have many, many more shoots.

At last hatching day arrived. Ah Sze's wife set a pot of rice on to boil and nervously watched for the time when the steam from it would rise straight up. Old Tung Pao lit the incense and candles he had bought in anticipation of this event. Devoutly, he placed them before the idol of the Kitchen God. His two sons went into the fields to pick wild flowers. Little Pao chopped a lamp-wick into fine pieces and crushed the wild flowers the men brought back. Everything was ready. The sun was entering its zenith; steam from the rice pot puffed straight upwards. Ah Sze's wife immediately leaped to her feet, stuck a "sacred" paper flower and a pair of goose feathers into the knot of hair at the back of her head and went to the shed. Old Tung Pao carried a wooden scale-pole; Ah Sze followed with the chopped lamp-wick and the crushed wild flowers. Daughter-in-law uncovered the cloth pieces to which the grubs were adhered, and sprinkled them with the bits of wick and flowers Ah Sze was holding. Then she took the wooden scale-pole from Old Tung Pao and hung the cloth pieces over it. She next removed the pair of goose feathers from her hair. Moving them lightly across the cloth, she brushed the grubs, together with the crushed lamp-wick and wild flowers, on to a large tray. One set, two sets ... the last set contained the foreign breed. The grubs from this cloth were brushed on to a separate tray. Finally, she removed the "sacred" paper flower from her hair and pinned it, with the goose feathers, against the side of the tray.

A solemn ceremony! One that had been handed down through the ages! Like warriors taking an oath before going into battle! Old Tung Pao and family now had ahead of them a

month of fierce combat, with no rest day or night, against bad weather, bad luck and anything else that might come along!

The grubs, wriggling in the trays, looked very healthy. They were all the proper black colour. Old Tung Pao and his daughter-in-law were able to relax a little. But when the old man secretly took another look at his garlic, he turned pale! It had grown only four measly shoots! Ah! Would this year be like last year all over again?

But the "fateful" garlic proved to be not so psychic after all. The silkworms of Old Tung Pao's family grew and thrived! Though it rained continuously during the grubs' First Sleep and Second Sleep, and the weather was a bit colder than at Clear and Bright, the "little darlings" were extremely robust.

The silkworms of the other families in the village were not doing badly either. A tense kind of joy pervaded the countryside. Even the small stream seemed to be gurgling with bright laughter. Lotus' family was the sole exception. They were only raising one set of grubs, but by the Third Sleep their silkworms weighed less than twenty catties. Just before the Big Sleep, people saw Lotus' husband walk to the stream and dump out his trays. That dour, old-looking man had bad luck written all over him.

Because of this dreadful event, the village women put Lotus' family strictly "off limits." They made wide detours so as not to pass her door. If they saw her or her taciturn husband, no matter how far away, they made haste to go in the opposite direction. They feared that even one look at Lotus or her spouse, the briefest conversation, would contaminate them with the unfortunate couple's bad luck!

Old Tung Pao strictly forbade Ah To to talk to Lotus. "If I catch you gabbing with that baggage again, I'll disown you!" he threatened in a loud, angry voice, standing outside on the porch to make sure Lotus could hear him.

Little Pao was also warned not to play in front of Lotus' door, and not to speak to anyone in her family.

The old man harped at Ah To morning, noon and night, but the boy turned a deaf ear to his father's grumbling. In his heart, he laughed at it. Of the whole family, Ah To alone didn't place much stock in taboos and superstitions. He didn't talk with Lotus, however. He was much too busy for that.

By the Big Sleep, their silkworms weighed three hundred catties. Every member of Old Tung Pao's family, including twelve-year-old Little Pao, worked for two days and two nights without sleeping a wink. The silkworms were unusually sturdy. Only twice in his sixty years had Old Tung Pao ever seen the like. Once was the year he married; once when his first son was born.

The first day after the Big Sleep, the "little darlings" ate seven loads of leaves. They were now a bright green, thick and healthy. Old Tung Pao and his family, on the contrary, were much thinner, their eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep.

C

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

Taken from *Spring Silkworms and Other Stories* and reproduced by kind permission of Foreign Languages Press, Beijing

a nursing infant, she sat absolutely quiet, not daring to stir. At night, she took the five sets to bed with her. Her husband was routed out, and had to share Ah To's bed. The tiny silkworm eggs were very scratchy against her flesh. She felt happy and a little frightened, like the first time she was pregnant and the baby moved inside her. Exactly the same sensation!

Uneasy but eager, the whole family waited for the eggs to hatch. Ah To was the only exception. We're sure to hatch a good crop, he said, but anyone who thinks we're going to get rich in this life, is out of his head. Though the old man swore Ah To's big mouth would ruin their luck, the boy stuck to his guns.

A clean dry shed for the growing grubs was all prepared. The second day of incubation, Old Tung Pao smeared a garlic with earth and placed it at the foot of the wall inside the shed. If, in a few days, the garlic put out many sprouts, it meant the eggs would hatch well. He did this every year, but this year he was more reverential than usual, and his hands trembled.



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## The Chengdu-Kunming Railway

In the days of the Southwestern Silk Road, it would have taken weeks, even months, to travel from Chengdu to Kunming or vice versa. Nowadays, by train, it

takes about twenty hours. However, travellers wishing to see as much as possible along the line (which runs more or less parallel to the old Lingguan Route) are advised to plan for a few stops and side trips en route.

From Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province and located in the western part of the Sichuan Basin at 506 metres above sea-level, the railway line runs via Mount Emei, the River Dadu, the Xiangling Range, the Liangshan Mountains, the River Jinsha and the eastern fringes of the Hengduan Range to Kunming, capital of Yunnan, on the Central Yunnan Plateau. The train thus traverses a wide variety of landscapes, geological systems and climatic zones.

It took six years to construct the railway line, which went into operation on July 1 1970. Its length of 1,085 kilometres includes more than 900 bridges and viaducts (totalling 92 kilometres) and 2,291 tunnels (totalling 337 kilometres). Nine of the tunnels are over three kilometres long and one — the Shamulada Tunnel, the longest of them all — is more than six kilometres long.

Below are highlights of the trip, as well as some of the excursion possibilities from stations along the line.

**Mount Emei**, the sacred Buddhist pilgrimage mountain, is three hours' ride from Chengdu. The ascent of the 3,309-metre-high mountain starts from Baoguo Monastery. It takes around four days to go up and down on foot. However, the elderly, the unfit and those who are pressed for time can now take a bus as far as Jieyin Hall, then change to the cable car for the five-minute ride up to Jinding (Golden Top) at 3,048 metres. The cable car has been in operation since May 1988. Further afield, one can make a day trip to Leshan, thirty kilometres away. This is the location of the famous Great Buddha, seventy-one metres tall, carved from the cliff overlooking the River Minjiang in the Tang dynasty (618–907).

Three hours further on from Mount Emei is **Jinkouhe**. The station presents a picture which is later repeated dozens of times along the railway line; it is built high above the ground as a result of the lack of level terrain. Beyond Jinkouhe, the train makes its way through countless tunnels (for example, the six-kilometre-long Guancunba Tunnel) before crossing the iron bridge over the River Dadu.

An hour later, in Ganluo County, one arrives at the **Fenshuiling Pass** in the Lesser Xiangling Range. The pass lies 2,300 metres above sea-level, in other words, 1,800 metres higher than Chengdu! The

成昆鐵路  
CHENGDU-KUNMING RAILWAY





engineers had to lay the track here in loops. There are seven places along the route where this is necessary to cross mountain ranges.

Via the Shamulada Tunnel the train continues to **Xichang**, the half-way stage and capital of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. More than 2,100 years old, Xichang was an important point on the Lingguan Route and has a great deal to offer today. The scenery at Lake Qionghai, for example, but also Mount Lushan with its greenery, flowers and monasteries and the Stele Forest, inscribed with detailed records of the three severe earthquakes which occurred in 1536, 1732 and 1850 respectively, at Guangfu Temple. Also of exceptional interest is the Museum of the Liangshan Yi Slave Society, with exhibits on the history, social organization, customs, costumes, etc., of traditional Yi society, which continued in this area more or less intact until the 1950s. This museum is located at the foot of Mount Lushan. Another possible trip is to the Earth Forest at Huanglian, a conglomeration of geological strata covering an area of 133 hectares. Xichang has yet another claim to fame. Thanks to its clear atmosphere, it is the site of a rocket and satellite-launching facility! Visits are possible solely by taking the day trip organized locally.

Continuing south alongside the River Anning, one crosses the River Jinsha (the upper course of the Yangtse) and enters Yunnan Province before arriving at **Jinjiang** four hours — and many tunnels — later.

Next stop is **Yuanmou**, famous for the fossilized remains of an early hominid promptly dubbed Yuanmou Man (*Homo erectus yuanmouensis*) found there in 1965. There is a museum devoted to the finds in Yuanmou (and more are to be seen in the Yunnan Provincial Museum in Kunming). Yuanmou Man is said to have lived about 1.7 million years ago, a million years earlier than Peking Man.

From here it is roughly seven hours more to **Kunming**. The railway line runs parallel to the River Longchuan, winding its way through the foothills of the Hengduan Range and climbing from 1,070 metres above sea-level at Yuanmou to 1,520 metres at Longgudian via impressive bridges. Datianqing Bridge, over one kilometre long, is the longest on the whole trip and curves in a great 'S' shape. Kunming itself, terminus of the railway line and capital of Yunnan Province, is set at 1,890 metres above sea-level on the Yunnan Plateau and merits as long as you can give it.

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## Southwestern Silk Road

The so-called 'Southwestern Silk Road' comprised three sections. The first ran southwest from Chengdu via Qionglai, Yingjing, Xichang, Huili and Dayao to Dali; this was the Lingguan Route. The second, the Five-*chi* Path, not completed until a later date, ran south from Chengdu through Yibin, Yanjin, Weining and Qujing to Kunming's Lake Dianchi and thence via Chuxiong to Dali. The third — the Yongchang Route — was a joint continuation of these two; it ran from Dali southwest to the Burmese border via Yongping, Baoshan and Tengchong.

Since the routes crossed difficult and mountainous terrain with many deep river gorges, bridges were crucial points and were generally bamboo or iron chain suspension bridges. Bamboo, as a plentiful natural resource, would have been used

from ancient times, but there are also some very old iron chain suspension bridges. One famous example of an early bridge of the latter type was the Jihong Bridge across the River Lancang, which linked the counties of Yongping and Baoshan in Yunnan. Built in 1475, it was destroyed by floods in 1986.

The paths and tracks were themselves of interest. Those running through deep forests usually had a surface of wooden planks and earth mixed with stones. But the most spectacular vestiges of the old routes are the 'gallery' plank roads. To construct these, holes were made in the cliff wall, short support sticks were inserted in these holes, then wooden planks were rested across the supports to form a roadway.

Apart from horses, the main beast of burden used along the Southwestern Silk Road was the mule. Those found in Sichuan and Yunnan are small but robust, sure-footed and thus ideal for the rigours of the route, and able to carry heavy loads for a long distance. A mule train might consist of dozens, even hundreds, of animals. Unlike the camels which served the equivalent purpose on the better-known Silk Road in the northwest of China, they could not go without food and water, but in the southwest there was no shortage of water, and there were many staging posts with provisions for man and beast alike.

Today, there is no need to hire a mule train to carry your luggage and you don't have to clamber along plank roads above raging rivers. You can follow the ancient roads by train, bus or car! The Chengdu-Kunming railway line, completed in 1970, covers much of the former Lingguan Route, as does the Sichuan-Yunnan Highway, built in 1939. Further to the southwest the Burma Road — opened up in 1939 — from Kunming to the Burmese border follows the course of the old Yongchang Route.

Additional spice is given to a visit to this region by the large number of minority peoples who live there. Some of them have been living in very much the same location since the early days of trading activities, others have settled since then. The Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, with its administrative centre at Xichang in southern Sichuan, and the Weining Yi, Hui and Miao Autonomous County in north-western Guizhou are just the start. In Yunnan there are the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture and, for those lucky enough to be granted permission to visit the border areas, the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture.



Average Climatic Conditions on the Lingguan Route in Sichuan

		Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Hanyuan	Temperature (°C)	8.3	10.3	15.0	19.3	22.1	23.6	25.9	25.6	22.2	18.3	14.1	10.1
	Rainfall (mm)	1.1	5.4	16.0	45.7	72.1	106.8	165.4	145.8	102.7	48.4	15.1	1.6
	Hours of sunshine	115.8	112.4	156.5	163.0	123.9	97.9	159.2	169.3	97.7	79.1	91.9	109.1
Ya'an	Temperature (°C)	6.1	7.7	12.2	17.0	20.5	23.3	25.3	24.9	21.0	16.6	12.1	7.8
	Rainfall (mm)	18.5	29.2	52.5	93.0	141.6	167.8	398.5	447.7	226.8	115.1	61.6	22.0
	Hours of sunshine	58.7	56.0	81.3	106.1	99.4	106.6	143.2	158.7	72.2	55.3	52.7	52.0
Xichang	Temperature (°C)	9.5	11.8	16.4	19.5	21.2	21.1	22.6	22.2	19.9	16.6	12.9	10.0
	Rainfall (mm)	4.8	6.4	9.1	26.1	88.9	203.4	215.5	178.1	170.3	84.8	19.9	5.8
	Hours of sunshine	234.0	220.2	263.0	252.6	218.1	140.1	177.8	197.9	149.9	157.0	196.2	219.0

Train Schedules  
Chengdu-Xichang-Kunming

389 F.T.	321 F.T.	93 Exp.	91 Exp.	Train Station	No.	92 Exp.	94 Exp.	322 F.T.	390 F.T.
07:49	18:02	16:00	22:07	Chengdu		13:20	09:15	07:44	19:42
09:34	20:00	—	—	Meishan		—	—	05:42	17:36
10:52	21:17	18:46	00:54	Emei		10:03	06:20	04:24	16:13
—	23:48	—	—	Jinkouhe		—	—	01:36	—
14:45	01:20	—	—	Ganluo		—	—	00:14	12:12
20:19	07:39	—	09:53	Xichang		01:16	22:22	18:41	07:04
02:10	—	08:53	—	Yuanmou		—	18:33	—	00:39
06:24	—	—	—	Lufeng		—	—	—	21:05
09:10	—	15:11	—	Kunming		—	11:15	—	18:55

Exp. — Express

F.T. — Fast through passenger train

Hotels in Sichuan

City	Name	Address	Telephone
Chengdu	Chengdu Hotel	Dongfeng Road	44112, 43312
	Dongfeng Hotel	31, Zongfu Street	27012
	Jinjiang Hotel	36, Renmin Road South	24481
	Rongcheng Hotel	130, Shaanxi Street	28496, 28497
	Wangjiang Hotel	42, Xiashahe Street	29348, 41370
Xichang	Changzheng Guest-house	Chang'an Road	2804
	Qionghai Guesthouse	Xinchun Village	3992
	Xichang Hotel	Chang'an Road	3145
Yibin	Jiuxiang Hotel	Zhuanshu Street	—
	Xiezhou Building	Renmin Road	—

## Wind, Rain and Moon

There is an old saying which Chinese people still like to use when the subject of the idiosyncrasies of the climate of western Sichuan crops up: 'Hanyuan wind, Ya'an rain and Xichang moon'. These three places along the ancient Lingguan Route do indeed have some special characteristics.

### Hanyuan Wind

Hanyuan County lies between the western rim of the Sichuan Basin and the Liangshan Mountains in southern Sichuan. With 94% of its terrain mountainous, the county has twenty-one peaks rising to over 3,000 metres above sea-level. Its central area, criss-crossed by river valleys (the major one being that of the River Dadu), contains the richest agricultural land and is sheltered from the westerlies by the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.

However, at an altitude of between 1,000 and 1,800 metres above sea-level, the wind blows up the valleys during the day-time and blows back down at night. This local wind is caused by the difference between the temperature on the peaks and in the valley bottoms. The valley of the Dadu, deep and long, experiences even greater temperature differences and thus stronger

winds. The ancients were intrigued by this, to them mysterious, phenomenon and the 'Hanyuan wind' accordingly made its way into the history books.

### Ya'an Rain

With an average of 1,773.3 millimetres of rain and around 218 rainy days a year, and an average of 6.5 rainy hours a day, Ya'an has been known since ancient times as the 'Rain Screen of Western China', 'Rain City', and 'Heaven's Sieve'. Still, compared to other places in the area, its rainfall is not that excessive; it receives less rain than nearby Mount Emei. The fact is that, although it does not rain particularly hard in Ya'an, it rains more or less non-stop!

In autumn, while most of China is enjoying dry, clear weather, it continues to drizzle in Sichuan. This makes for a disappointing Mid-Autumn Festival for local residents, since the moon — the main attraction — rarely makes an appearance through the cloud cover. It is on record that Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, only enjoyed a clear festival night twice between 1951 and 1980, while in Ya'an, during the same period, the figure was just once — in 1956.

This is reflected in the subject matter of local poets, who rarely mention the moon, unlike poets elsewhere in China. Sunshine is equally rare. The Tang-dynasty poet Liu

Zongyuan once wrote: '... in the south of Sichuan rain falls all the time and there is no sun. Dogs bark if the sun comes out'. Since then, 'Sichuan dogs bark at the sun' has become a common expression to describe the dull weather of the area.

### Xichang Moon

Xichang is nicknamed 'Moon City'. It was called Jianchang in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, when there was a saying that 'in the middle of every lunar month, the moon shines like a clear mirror (in Jianchang)'. Nearby Lake Qionghai is considered the perfect place from which to view the moon. However, Xichang does not really live up to its nickname since almost 60% of its rain in the rainy season falls at night, so many nights are overcast.

Although most of the towns in the Liangshan Mountains region are situated in river valleys, Xichang lies on a wide plain beside the River Anning. On the plain there is a greater temperature difference between day and night. In March and April, the drier season in Xichang, the temperature in the early morning is around 10°C, rising to 24–27°C at midday. This is almost as broad a range as in Xinjiang's Turpan, with its desert climate. Maybe this is why the Liangshan Yi always carry or wear a *charwa*, a thick felt cape.



### Silk Road Celebrations

China is gearing up to mark the twenty-second century of existence of the Silk Road. A committee has been formed with members from Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang — all areas traversed by the ancient trade route. A series of activities is planned between May and October, including performances, seminars, and exhibitions of Silk Road relics. The five provinces/regions are also organizing a Silk Road tour during this same period, which will include camel caravans for the more adventurous. In addition, it is reported that UNESCO is undertaking a five-year expedition along the Silk Road involving academics from thirty-five countries, which will start from Xi'an in Shaanxi Province this year.

### Dunhuang Tales

Located at the western end of the Gansu Corridor in Gansu Province, Dunhuang was an important stop on the old Silk Road. It boasts some of China's greatest art treasures in the Mogao Grottoes. A book of thirty-five stories on places of historic interest and scenic beauty in the vicinity has now been brought out by the New World Press. Published in English, the book is entitled *Tales from Dunhuang*.

### Fujian 'Roots' Tour

The Xiamen branch of China Travel Service has just launched a tour designed specifically for foreign visitors, especially residents of Taiwan and Overseas Chinese who want to explore their roots. The tour gives a good overview of traditional religious practices in southern Fujian, with visits to the very first Mazu (Tianhou) Temple on Meizhou Island and another in Putian, to the Ciji Temple in Xiamen and a second in Zhangzhou, and to Sanping Monastery in Pinghe.

### Hebei's 'Golden Triangle'

Hebei China Travel Service (CTS), in conjunction with the Chengde Tourism Agency and CTS branches in Beidaihe, Tangshan and Zunhua, is proposing a 'Golden Triangle' tour centred in Chengde. Highlights include the monasteries and temples built from 1703 onwards when Chengde became the Qing imperial summer resort; the Mulan Grasslands; a visit to practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, with a chance to try out herbal medicinal concoctions; a banquet in Qing-dynasty style and Manchu dances; Qing-dynasty buildings in Zunhua County; and a visit to Tangshan, which was destroyed in the very severe earthquake of July 1976.

### 1990 International Dragon Boat Race

The Hongkong Tourist Association has announced that this year's International Dragon Boat Festival will be held on June 2-3. The dragon boat races will take place alongside the Tsimshatsui East waterfront, and are expected to draw around thirty teams from such countries as Australia, Canada, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as teams from China, Hong Kong and Macau. Last year's exciting finish saw a club from Vancouver beat long-time champions Shunde from Guangdong Province.

### Buildings Declared Cultural Relics

Among the twenty buildings recently added to the list of cultural relics protected by Beijing's municipal regulations, several date only from the early years of this century. Among them are St. Joseph's Catholic Church and the Chongwenmen Protestant Church, built in 1904 and 1903 respectively, as well as buildings at Qinghua University, part of the Beijing Hotel, the Geography Building at Beijing University, and two middle schools. Cultural relics of older date protected include a cave group in the granite hills of Yanqing County, north-west of the city, which is invaluable for the study of minority peoples of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (902-979).

### First Tourism Data Bank

Beijing's Tianma Tourism Development Company and the Beijing Telegraph Bureau are preparing to launch China's first computerized tourism data bank. Part of the system is now undergoing trial operation, and it is expected to be fully operational prior to the start of the 11th Asian Games to be held in the capital this September.

The data bank will incorporate information on tourism organizations, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, scenic spots, route details, shopping guides, weather and traffic conditions, sport, entertainment and religious activities.

Anyone or any organization will be able to access the system for free information via telex, but organizations which wish to have data included in the data bank will be charged a fee.

### International Great Wall Rally

Scheduled to precede the 11th Asian Games in Beijing, a rally jointly sponsored by China and Italy is to take place this September 1-15. Around 350 professional drivers in 100 racing cars and on 150 motorcycles are expected to take part in the race from Shanhaiguan in eastern Hebei to Jiayuguan in north-western Gansu. The course, parallel to the Great Wall and amounting to some 2,400 kilometres, crosses a variety of terrain including mountain ranges, loess plateau, grasslands and deserts and will take the competitors through areas never before open to foreigners — the result of years of negotiations. The sponsors of the rally, which will be in line with FISA, FIM and CMSA regulations, include the Beijing International Sports Exchange Centre, the Beijing Motor Sports Association, Italy 2000 and Marco Polo 2000.

### Festival of Religious Music

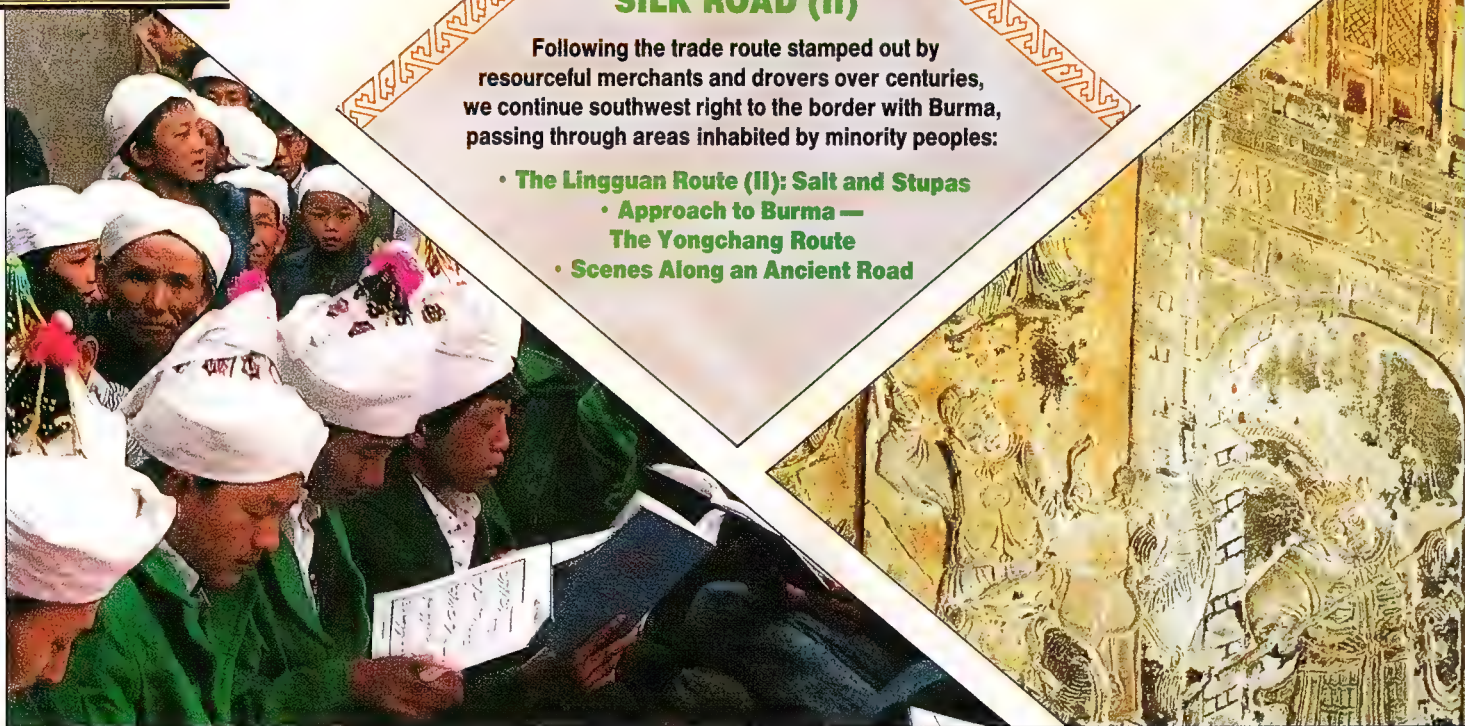
China's first festival of Buddhist and Taoist music is to be held in Beijing from June 1-6 this year. Religious bodies from more than twenty provinces, cities and autonomous regions are expected to participate and a symposium on religious music will be conducted by Chinese and foreign experts. Sponsors of the festival's events include the China Art Academy, the Buddhist Association of China, the China Taoist Association and the Beijing Buddhist Association.



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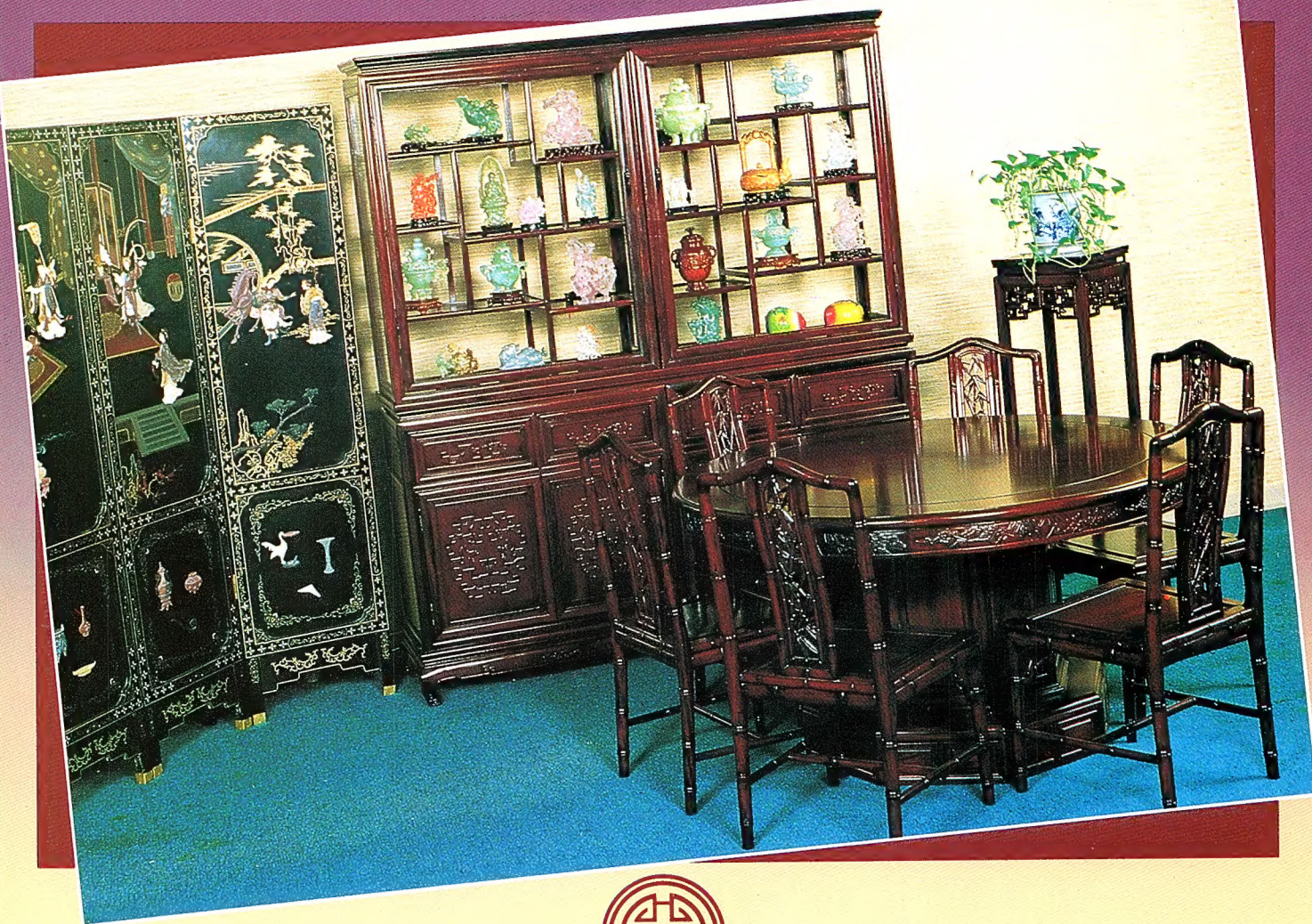
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